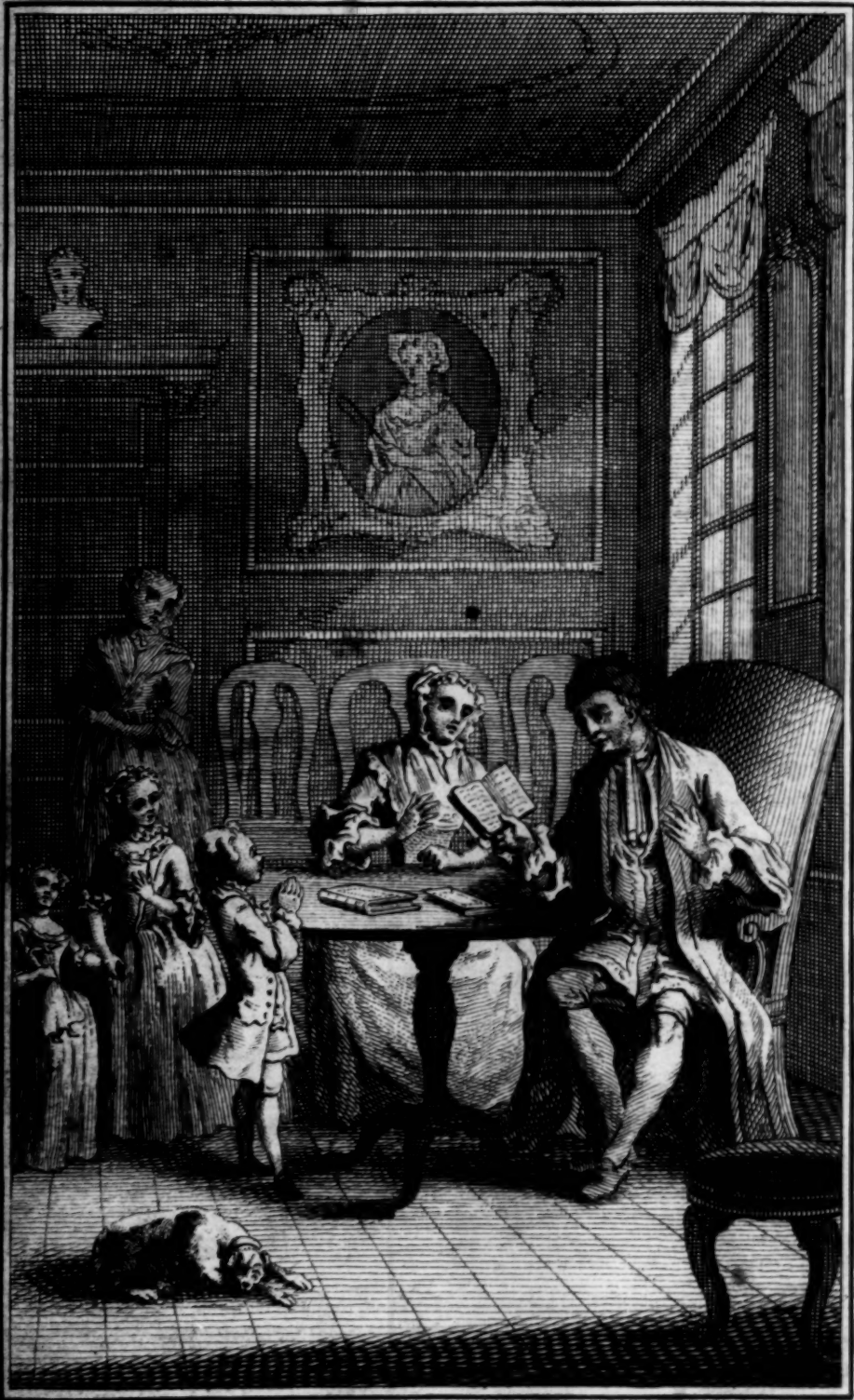
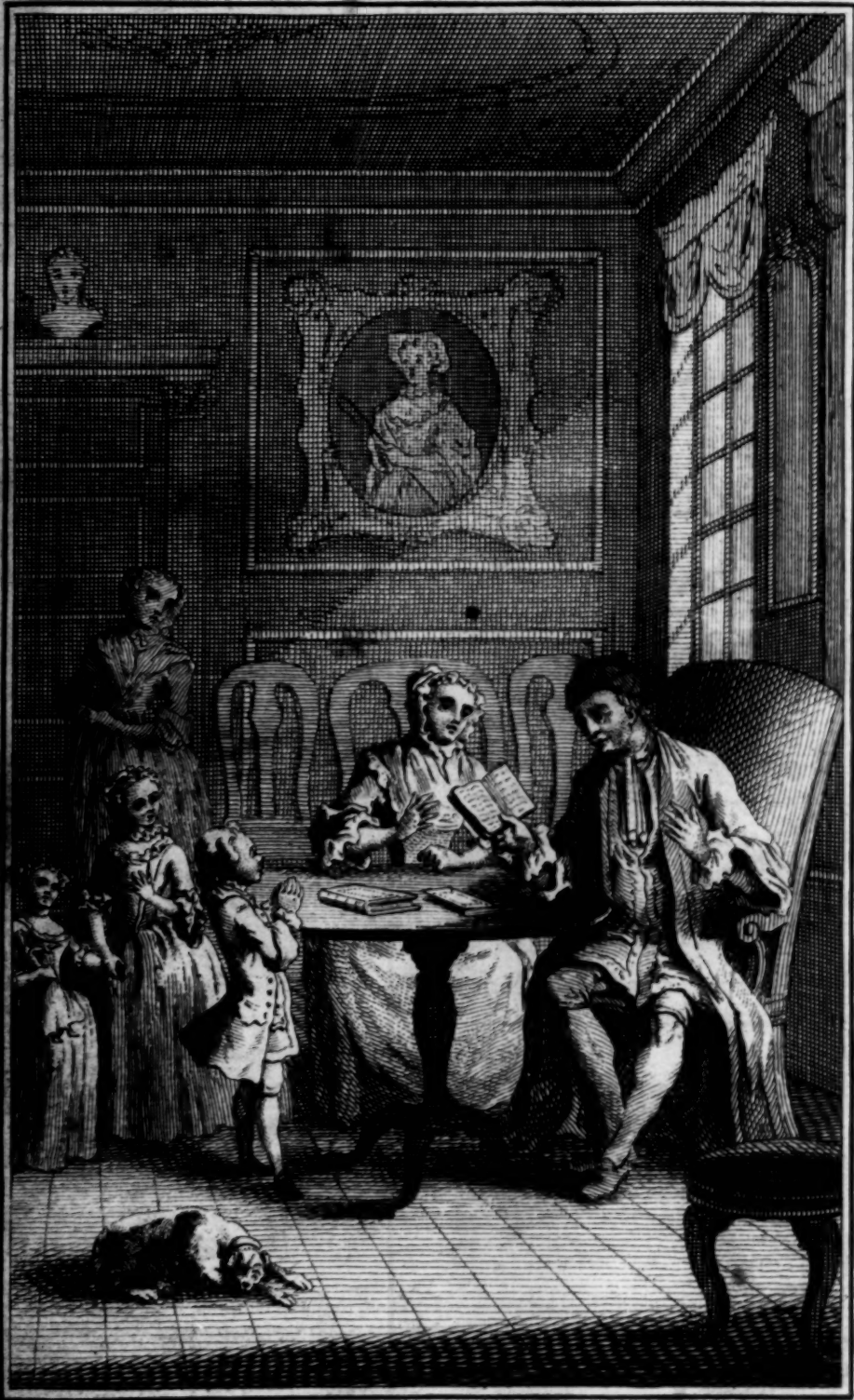




Boitard delin.

Scotin sculp.



Boitard delin.

Scotin sculp.

THE
FAMILY-PREACHER:
CONSISTING OF
PRACTICAL DISCOURSES
FOR
Every SUNDAY throughout the Year.
AS ALSO,
FOR CHRISTMAS-DAY, GOOD-FRIDAY,
And other particular Occasions.

By *D. BELLAMY*,
Minister of *Petersham and Kew*, in the County of
Surry, and Vicar of *St. Stephen's* in *Hertfordshire*.

*My Intention is to give the World, or at least that Part of the
World which I have the Honour to instruct, a right Notion
of Religion in general; and a just Character of those cardinal
Virtues which support it, without descending to those parti-
cular Points which divide it.* DR. HICKMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N:

Printed by W. FADEN,
For T. BELLAMY, Bookseller at Kingston upon Thames.
MDCCLIV.





P R E F A C E.

S no Age was ever more inquisitive than the present, I have frequently thought, that every one, who has courage and resolution enough to commence Author, should come to a very close, strict, and impartial Self-Examination, before he enters the Lists; and that the more extensive his acquirements are, the more universal his acquaintance is, and the more conspicuous his character and station in life may be, the more he should be upon his guard, the greater command he should have over his thoughts and passions, and the more cautious and circumspect should he be, of propagating any such tenets as may be liable to reproach, prove dangerous in their consequences, or have the least tendency to misguide the illiterate, and run counter to the Public Good: every Author, I say, who has any regard for his own reputation, and the benefit and advantage of his fellow-creatures, should, in my humble opinion, be as free as possible from all prejudice and prepossession, and, with all the calmness and serenity of mind imaginable, should address himself, before he enters upon any dissertation of importance, in terms to this,

A

or

or the like effect ; namely, “ Will the Treatise
“ I propose to recommend to the perusal of the
“ Public, contribute, in any degree, towards
“ the reformation or improvement of mankind?
“ — Will it illustrate, and render more intelli-
“ gible, any useful branch of art or science?—
“ Will any of my readers be one virtue the
“ better, and consequently wiser, or more
“ happy through my Lucubrations?”—And
if his heart shall answer him in the Affirmative,
then, but not till then, let him pursue the Plan
he has so maturely formed, with the utmost
vigour and intrepidity; but, on the other hand,
in case he shall find, on deep recollection,
that no wise, no laudable purpose will be an-
swered by his intended labours; then let him
give a check to the violence of his ambition of
appearing in Print; let him consult his sin-
cerest friends and well-wishers, and procure
their impartial advice in so important an affair,
or enter once more into himself, and give a
disinterested answer to the following interroga-
tories.—“ May not this intended discourse of
“ mine, by its being too artfully disguised, be
“ productive of mischief in the event?— May
“ it not have a natural tendency to unhinge
“ the mind of some weak and unlettered
“ reader, who being incapable of starting any
“ material objections to the fallacious, tho’
“ seemingly plausible arguments I should pos-
“ sibly produce, may, thro’ his ignorance,
“ and want of a true discerning faculty, be-
“ come

P R E F A C E.

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“ come hereafter diffident and distrustful in
 “ the belief of those important truths whereon
 “ not only his present but future happiness in
 “ a great measure depend?—Shall I, out of
 “ a sinister view of profit, or the false pride
 “ and ambition of being applauded as a shrewd
 “ and artful Writer, wilfully and knowingly
 “ lead any part of mankind astray, and thereby
 “ induce them to hazard their felicity both here
 “ and hereafter, by corrupting their principles,
 “ which before perhaps were satisfactorily e-
 “ nough settled and established, by endeavour-
 “ ing to prevail on them to imbibe such per-
 “ nicious tenets, as either the abandoned com-
 “ pany I have kept, the prophane and impious
 “ Authors I have from time to time consulted,
 “ or my own vicious inclinations have promp-
 “ ted me to vindicate and defend?—Shall I,
 “ with a secret pleasure, usher into the world
 “ my idle dreams, my romantic and absurd no-
 “ tions, as solid and substantial truths, and dress
 “ them up in all the arts of persuasion, in
 “ order to procure them a more favourable re-
 “ ception, than in reality they deserve?—Shall
 “ I, in a word, by gilding over the Pill, en-
 “ deavour to render the Poison that is con-
 “ cealed under it, more universally palatable,
 “ be the consequence ever so fatal?—No,
 “ surely.—Let me rather restrain the dange-
 “ rous passion of communicating my thoughts
 “ to the public; let me despise the applause
 “ and approbation of those, who will allow

“ nothing to be wrote with spirit, but what is
“ diametrically opposite to all truth, religion,
“ and virtue ; let me, in short, much rather
“ be modestly silent, than amuse the world
“ with such false fire :—but in case I am abso-
“ lutely determined to exert my faculty of writ-
“ ing, let my thoughts turn on such topics
“ only as may tempt my readers either to be-
“ come more social neighbours, more loyal
“ subjects, or better Christians than they were
“ before ; or, if so be, I have no such import-
“ ant articles in view ; if my principal aim
“ be, rather to amuse than to instruct ; at
“ least let my attempt be decent, innocent,
“ and inoffensive.”

These considerations, I must confess, have ever carried their full weight with me, and I have all along made them the invariable rule of my conduct in regard to my public compositions ; for the truth of which, I appeal to my former Endeavours, as well as the present Undertaking ; and I trust it will very evidently appear, that I have advanced no new doctrines, have laid no snares wilfully to lead any one astray, or to tempt him to act otherwise than would become a Man of Honour and a Christian.

My first Attempt was, *Twelve Discourses on the Truth and Excellency of the Christian Religion* ; and I should think myself very dissingenuous, should I not readily acknowledge, that they met with a more favourable reception and encouragement

couragement from my friends, than I could, with any share of modesty, have well expected; tho' I should be too vain, was I not as ready to confess, at the same time, that I believe the success which attended them was more owing to their partial friendship, than to any intrinsic or extraordinary merit in the compositions themselves.

Soon after the publication of those Discourses, I formed a new Plan for fifty-two more; that is to say, One for every Sunday throughout the Year, which I proposed should be Enlargements on such practical subjects, as might form a complete System of Ethics.—I came, moreover, to this farther resolution, not only to avoid any critical or abstruse researches, but to contrive matters so, that all the propositions I advanced should be made so plain and easy, that, as the Prophet expresses it, *they might run who read them.*—And what principally induced me, indeed, to engage in such an Undertaking was, the inexpressible mischief which I perceived frequently to arise from enthusiastical writings, which work strongly on the passions of weak men, who are too prone to be led astray by every Wind of Doctrine.

I was in hopes, I confess, that I might be able to prevail on several to exchange those crude and unintelligible composures, for more plain and rational discourses, and by setting our most holy religion in the fairest and most advantageous light, might have a pleasing prospect

spect of persuading some of them to embrace the doctrines of our Blessed Saviour, out of pure love and affection, who seemed before to practise them only with fear and trembling.

When I first entered upon this work, I proposed to myself, that the whole should consist of Original Pieces ; but upon more mature reflection, I was fully convinced of the vanity, and indeed folly of so hasty and presumptuous a thought. —When, therefore, I duly considered how many, of much greater acquirements and much longer experience than myself, had travelled the same road, but with very indifferent success, I determined immediately to content myself with making the most judicious Extracts I was able from the writings of the most universally admired Prelates and Divines, who had treated before me on the particular subjects that I had pitched upon, and would best suit my purpose, imagining, and I hope very justly, that it could be but of very little importance, whether I conveyed my own sentiments, or produced my own arguments only, or those of others, to my readers, provided they were such as were solid and substantial ; such as might carry conviction along with them ; such as might either excite their dread of punishment, or cherish their hopes of rewards ; imagining, in short, that if such readers were but made wiser and better, let the means be what it would, my ambition would be fully answered,

answered, and my time as well employed as I could possibly wish it.

However, when I came to this determination, I was no ways insensible of the objections that are commonly started against compilations in general ; namely, that they are infringements on the properties of other men ; no testimonies of any fertile genius, and at best but injurious republications of what had appeared before in a better and more advantageous light.

This consideration, however just and rational it may be, had not, I confess, weight enough to deter me from the prosecution of my design ; for I recollected, that many of the persons into whose hands this Work was most likely to fall were such as had no large libraries of their own ; and moreover, I did not propose to make such an ungenerous use of the labours of others, as to render either the purchase, or the reading of their works needless ; but as a great number of the most excellent discourses of the ablest Divines were either adapted to the times wherein they lived, and the state and condition of the respective assemblies before whom they preached ; and the critical as well as controversial learning, with which many of them abounded ; as also, the party-reflections that were too often interspersed throughout those discourses, were no small impediments to that improvement which an unlettered reader might otherwise reap from them ; I was of

opinion, therefore, and am now confirmed in it, that in case the practical part only was selected from such Authors as *Stillington*, *Tillotson*, *Sharp*, *Atterbury*, &c. &c. such Extracts, judiciously executed, must of necessity prove more advantageous to the reader, than the productions of any person so obscure as myself, let his acquirements be as extensive as they will, and his endeavours ever so laborious.

Upon this full conviction, I made it my first study and care to purchase the proper materials for the better accomplishment of the end proposed: in the next, I applied myself very attentively to the perusal of the Books I had procured, and in extracting such passages as I imagined most striking, and most conducive to edification; and in the last, I took no small pains in revising my Manuscripts, and ranging each flower into the proper bed where I proposed to transplant it.

In a short time, I found the Work begin to swell so very considerably under my hands, that I imagined the compass of a few Sermons, would be too narrow for so large a provision of materials; for which purpose, I drew up a Plan of a Paraphrase on the New Testament, proposing to make use of my Extracts as Occasional Annotations; in which design I was very considerably assisted by several very eminent and learned Gentlemen of my own profession, who were of opinion, that such a Work, properly pursued, would be extremely useful.

Thus

Thus encouraged, I soon after printed Proposals for the publication of it by Subscription; but as such a Work would be very long and tedious in the execution, I thought proper, previous thereto, to print a Specimen of the manner in which I proposed to finish the before-mentioned Undertaking; and accordingly ushered into the world a Paraphrase on the Book of JOB on the same Plan; and notwithstanding I had no reason to complain of the reception which that comparatively diminutive performance met with, yet my daily avocations render it impracticable for me to accomplish so laborious an Undertaking as the former, were my inclinations ever so strong, or my abilities every way equal to the task proposed.

Despairing therefore of ever bringing that long laboured Scheme to any happy issue; and being very loth that the materials which I had collected with so much industry and expence should lie altogether useless, I determined to return to my original intention, and convert them at last into Sermons: and this I have found time to carry into execution; and am in no small hopes, that it may be not only useful in some private families, but deemed an acceptable service to the Public in general.

There are some of my readers, 'tis very possible, would have been glad to have had the particular Extracts pointed out to them, that they might more readily have known to whom they

they were indebted for the instruction of the Day. And in this particular I would very willingly have gratified their curiosity, if in reality I could have complied therewith ; but as the materials were collected for the purposes before-mentioned, such references are impracticable to be made, and any attempt of that nature would be absolutely fruitless ; especially, as the greater part of these Sermons are so altered in the diction, tho' not in the sense, that they might, without any impropriety, be termed Originals.

Twenty of the following Discourses, at least, exclusive of any compilement, I may venture to lay claim to as my own ; but as I have introduced them into the Set, more to gratify such of my private friends and acquaintance as have been pleased to intimate that they were affected with them, upon the delivery, than to sooth my own vanity as an Author, I shall beg likewise to be excused from pointing them out by any particular mark of distinction. And to confess the truth ingenuously, I am conscious to myself, that they will not make the same figure in the Closet as they may possibly have done in the Pulpit ; and the reason is doubtless obvious enough : what a man composes himself, he naturally delivers with greater ease, freedom and energy, than he can possibly utter the compositions of others, to whose style, and manner of diction he is in a great measure a stranger ; and this is so self-evident

evident a fact, that I have known some persons sagacious enough to give a guess whether the Sermon delivered was the actual composition of the Preacher, or borrowed from some more able Performer; and I am apt to believe, that they have not frequently been mistaken.

Tho' I think it would be an inexcusable vanity to point out my own composures; yet I should think myself very remiss, and indeed almost ungrateful, did I not distinguish the performances of such as have kindly lent me an Assisting Hand; but as I have no authority to mention their particular names, as yet, I shall content myself with prefixing an Index, an Asterism, or some other mark, to demonstrate to the reader, that they are not my own, but the labours of my friends.

As what we are now offering to the Public may, with propriety enough, be termed Sunday-Evenings Devotions, we shall here take the liberty of introducing a few cursory directions for the spending the Sabbath, or Lord's Day in particular, in the most acceptable manner to him, who constituted that Day of Rest; and in the most beneficial manner we possibly can, in regard to the improvement of ourselves, and those who are dependants upon us.

And here I think it will not be improper to observe, that as the public Service of the Temple on that holy day, in reality, includes but a few hours of it, I doubt not but there are

are a great number of sincere Christians, who think it a duty incumbent on them to devote a larger portion of that day to pious purposes, and not to squander away those precious moments, in idle, if not sinful recreations, as is the too customary practice of the present gay and licentious Age. It were greatly to be wished, therefore, that every conscientious Master of a family would, not only on that day, but every day throughout the year, devote some small portion of his time to the service of his great Creator; and every morning and evening, at least, either read himself, or cause to be read in the presence of his whole family, some short prayer, in order to implore his blessing, upon the one hand on the operations of the ensuing day; and on the other, to return him proper thanksgivings for the mercies vouchsafed on the day past. And I am fully persuaded, that by such an habitual practice of devotion, he would find it so far from being any impediment to him in the pursuit of his business, be his avocation what it will, that by raising thereby in his own mind a happy cheerfulness, and a firm trust and confidence in the good providence of God, it would contribute greatly to his successful execution of whatever he took in hand; and with this additional comfort likewise, that he would visibly perceive, that not only his children, but his domestics in general, through the influence of his good example, would be
more

more careful and industrious, more obedient and submissive to his directions, and more ambitious of pleasing him, than those of his neighbours, who were not equally conscientious, and but very seldom, if ever, looked devoutly upwards for a blessing on their endeavours.

But to return to the Day — Constant attendance at some public place of divine worship one day in the revolution of seven, is so easy, so reasonable a service in itself, that 'tis strongly enforced by all laws both human and divine; and I apprehend, that it would be a practice of no small importance, if the evenings of those holy days were set apart for reading, not only some select portion of the sacred Scriptures, but some short practical discourse composed by some eminent Divine. Time thus conscientiously spent, would, I conceive, have a very happy influence and effect on the morals of mankind in general.

I shall not here, take upon me to point out what Authors should be principally consulted on this solemn occasion, (the Inspired Penmen only excepted) since the last Age, as well as the present, have furnished every family with ample choice of the most shining lights: I am not, however, without hopes, that this Work may be ranked amongst the number of those that may be deemed useful; since I have been peculiarly careful to avoid all party-reflections, and to introduce nothing that may
give

give the least offence to any sincere Christian, tho' he may chance to differ, in some ceremonial articles, from our mother-church; for I have ever been of opinion, that union and harmony amongst Christians is best, where there is no material dispute in regard to Essentials. And further to render these discourses as universally acceptable as I could, I have reduced them into so narrow a compass, that any one may be read distinctly within the space of half an hour.

And as 'tis very probable, that this Attempt may be the last that I shall ever commit to the Press, should these my labours contribute towards the edification and improvement of any of my readers, I should more glory in such a happy issue, than in all the encomiums that could be conferred upon them; for it ever has been, and I humbly hope ever will be, my ambition, much rather to be valued for my uprightness and sincerity, than for any depth or penetration in any science how useful soever.

I shall dismiss this Preface, with making mention only of the intended application of the Profits that shall arise from the present Undertaking.

Some short time since, I communicated, as many of my friends I presume can well remember, a Plan that I had formed for the erection of a Parochial Library at *Kingston*; in the prosecution of which I was greatly encouraged

couraged by one Gentleman in particular of distinguished rank, who never turns a deaf ear to any proposition that has the least tendency to promote the public good, who declared, that 'twas his opinion, such a Library, if once erected, would prove of singular service to the studious part of the neighbourhood ; and as a testimony of his sentiments being sincere on that occasion, he voluntarily, and in the most courteous and benevolent manner imaginable, promised, in case the Scheme should be carried into actual execution, to send a large benefaction in books, and to promote the encrease of such Library in any shape that should be desired.

Upon this pleasing prospect, I ventured to publish Proposals for this Work at an advanced price to what it is at present, always setting apart One Moiety of the Profits arising therefrom to the sole service of the said Library, some of which Proposals were circulated in *Kingston* and the parts adjacent for the purpose above-mentioned ; but as I found the high price objected against, I stopt the current, and turned the channel another way.

As my Brother, during the short time those Proposals were circulating, intimated to me, that he should willingly give his attendance as Library-Keeper in case my Plan should succeed, I advised him, (as my Scheme I found met with opposition) to erect a Circulating Library at *Kingston*, himself, by Subscription,
on

on the very same footing, or terms, as those in *London*; and as an encouragement for his proceeding with vigour therein, I acquainted him, that I had come to a resolution to publish this Work at such a reasonable rate, as should render the purchase of it extremely easy to each Subscriber, and that the Profits arising from the sale should be appropriated to the improvement of his intended Library; but under this restriction, that he should extend his views, and introduce into his collection, not only books of entertainment, but such Authors likewise as may be wanted by Gentlemen of the most learned professions.

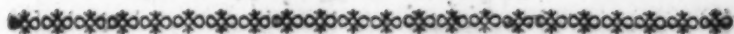
With these Conditions he very readily complied; and intends, and hopes likewise, that he shall be enabled, by due encouragement, to make in process of time such a valuable collection of Books as may be of infinite service to those who shall apply for their improvement in any art or science whatsoever.

Upon the whole, therefore, as the subsequent Undertaking is entered into with no other view than the Improvement of Mankind in general, in regard to their Morals; and as the Profits will be appropriated to the purposes above-mentioned, I flatter myself, that my good intentions will meet with the approbation of the Virtuous; and the Work itself, a suitable Encouragement from the Public.

Kingston, Surry,
June 5, 1754.



T H E
C O N T E N T S
O F T H E
F I R S T V O L U M E.



S U N D A Y I.

The Wisdom of believing a future State.

L U K E XVI, 25.

*But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy
life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise La-
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thou art tormented,* Page 1

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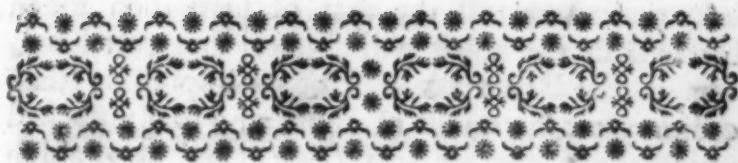
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The Wisdom of believing a future
State.

LUKE XVI. 25.

But Abraham said, son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.



HO' the characters of the *Rich Man* and *Lazarus* in the preceding part of this narration, as well as that of *Abraham* in our text, are beyond all contradiction, imaginary and allegorical only;—yet 'tis impossible for the joys of Heaven, or the torments of Hell, to be delineated in stronger, or more lively colours than in the Parable before us.

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WHEN-

WHENEVER our Blessed Saviour, who, doubtless, understood all the arts of persuasion much better than the ablest philosopher that ever lived, was inclined to make a stronger impression than ordinary on the minds of those who daily flocked round about him for instruction; and to establish some fundamental doctrine to which they were perfect strangers, he made choice of similitudes, or fictions, not only as the most easy and familiar, but the most effectual and prevailing method of conveyance.—He well knew, that nothing was more difficult than the art of making advice agreeable; that it was received by the generality of mankind with impatience and reluctance;—that it was looked upon as an implicit censure; and that the plain and open zeal, which one man expressed for the benefit and advantage of another, was for the most part esteemed either an act of impertinence or presumption.—Of all the various ways, therefore, of giving counsel, no one, he knew, was more tender and delicate, no one pleased more universally, than that of emblem or allusion.—Upon the reading or hearing of a fiction, mankind are induced to believe they advise themselves.—The precepts that are concealed, as it were, under it, insinuate themselves imperceptibly;—by this way, we are instructed by surprise, and become wiser and better unawares.—The blessed Spirit, therefore, which animated the sacred Penmen, both of the *Old* and *New Testament*, did not prohibit the use of visions or dreams; the opening of dreadful, as well as delightful scenes, and the introduction of machines, or other emblematical representations, upon such occasions as were very solemn and important.—The Divine Licence, in those respects, was marvellous and surprising, and sometimes too bold to be copied by
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an uninspired writer. Having premised thus much, we shall no longer consider our text as part of a Parable, but as a beautiful illustration of the punishments and rewards that attend a future state; and an ample vindication of the Providence of God, whose ways are frequently too dark and intricate for weak man to fathom; and as they are above his shallow comprehension, 'tis no great wonder, if he be sometimes tempted arrogantly to declare them erroneous.

THE Being of a God and the rewards and punishments attending a future state are truths so plain and obvious, that whoever seriously reflects on them, cannot but be struck with amazement, when he hears any one expressing the least doubt or distrust concerning them. As some weak and wicked men, however, have been so audacious, as to dispute the reality of them, we shall, in the subsequent discourse, suppose these points precarious, in order to set the folly of their disbelief in the strongest point of light:—but lest any illiterate person should entertain so fatal a mistake, as that there is so much as a bare possibility of these important articles being false and groundless, give me leave to assure him, that the most learned, as well as the most pious men, in all ages of the world, have declared it as absurd, to deny the existence of a Supreme Being, or the rewards and punishments that attend a future state; as it would be to assert, that it was not day-light, when the sun shines in his meridian lustre.

SUPPOSING then a future state could not be fairly proved,—as doubtless, however, it may, even to a demonstration; and supposing farther, that it were disputable, whether any all-seeing eye did in reality inspect, and pry into our most secret actions or not, and will either everlastingly punish

or reward us according to our works;—yet he is doubtless inexcusable, and guilty of the most egregious folly and imprudence, who either disbelieves himself a future state, or the rewards and punishments consequent thereupon, or endeavours to make others imbibe his absurd and pernicious notions.

AND this will manifestly appear, if we consider either the future state, into which, tho' we should suppose it were precarious, he might possibly be plunged, or his present state and condition in this life, which is absolutely certain.

HIS future state, therefore, which may possibly be, must be either a state of perfect happiness, or endless misery.—Now, in case the former should prove true, and that there are such things, in reality, as future rewards; yet he that does not believe that there is a life after this, and acts consistent with his infidelity, cannot, with the least shadow of justice, lay the least claim to, or live in any reasonable expectation of, the benefits arising from it.

IN order, therefore, to form some adequate idea, whether it be an act of the highest indiscretion, or not, to disbelieve, an act consistent with such infidelity, it will be absolutely necessary to enquire what those future rewards are, on the one hand, and what detriment or disadvantage may possibly attend such belief, on the other;—for, in case a certainty must be abandoned, or adventured for what is precarious and doubtful, and the thing to be so quitted, be a matter of the utmost importance, and that, for which it is to be abandoned, be not so in any reasonable proportion, it would then be a folly, doubtless, to run the hazard;—but on the contrary, where the profit and advantage, tho' precarious and uncertain, is very great,
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and the damage or hazard, very light and trivial, in comparison, there, according to the common opinion of all mankind, the person that would not venture, would be deemed shamefully remiss, and highly blame-worthy. — This is evident to a demonstration from the daily practices of all such as have any affairs of moment, of what nature or kind soever, to transact, and carry into execution. — Was it not for some future expectations of profit and advantage, the husbandman would never cultivate his lands, the merchant would never submit his ship or cargo to the danger of the seas, the tradesman would never give credit for his goods, nor the miser lend out his money upon usage; — since all, and each of these adventure something certain, run some apparent hazard and danger, with the prospect only of an uncertain profit.

Now it must be allowed, that, tho' the winds, the weather, and the seas, are very precarious things; — tho' the deficiencies of some men, with respect to abilities, and others, in regard to honesty, are stronger and better arguments to demonstrate the risque and hazard, which either the husbandman, the merchant, or the tradesman runs, to obtain those ends, which they respectively propose, than any the most confirmed infidel can, or ever will, be able to produce, in order to evince mankind of the uncertainty of a future state, and a retribution to be made in another life; yet it must be allowed, that such as put their trust and confidence in the several employments and professions above-mentioned, notwithstanding all the losses and misfortunes to which they are unavoidably exposed, act upon very rational grounds, and may justly live in the pleasing hopes of reaping, in due time, the fruits of their labours. — If

then the rewards of another life be of much greater moment and importance, than all the toils and fatigues we are to undergo, thro' the expectation of obtaining them, it will, doubtless, be an act of the highest folly and imprudence, not to make the experiment, and trust to the event.

AND that they are so, will appear from hence, that they are provided by an infinitely wise, almighty, and beneficent Being, and are by him proposed, as a means to secure obedience to his Divine Laws; from whence it will by consequence follow, that they must not only be of much greater value and consideration, than all the toils and fatigues, which that obedience will cost us, but be able to over-balance the advantage, which the possession of the one gives them over the other in reversion.

WE are not left, however, to conclude the excellency of these rewards, from such general considerations only; for they are likewise proposed to us inexpressibly great and glorious; such *as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man to conceive*:—not temporal, but eternal enjoyments, not such as are chequered with any disgusts, or exposed to any disappointments, but such as are pure and refined, without alloy.—The future state is represented to us as full of the most exalted satisfactions; as free from all sorrow and trouble; a state, where *all tears shall be wiped from our eyes*; where we shall live in the uninterrupted fruition of all that is good and amiable; of such transporting pleasures, as no accident can ever be able, either totally to deprive us of them, or in the least to diminish them.

AND now what present advantage in this transitory life can there be, which any man, endued with common sense, would not chearfully forego,

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on the bare probability of obtaining such a great and glorious, such an endless state of uninterrupted bliss, were he to hazard all the comforts and conveniencies of life,—nay, his life itself, in pursuit after this future state? And should he actually lose them, are they not enjoyments, which he must soon resign, tho' he does it with ever so much reluctance?—And will not the probable prospect of that which is infinite and eternal, amply compensate for that which is not only finite, but of very short duration?

LET US now consider a little the other side of the question; the possibility of a future state, and the torments of another life:—now, in case there should be a judgment reserved for the wicked in another world; it will, doubtless, prove a judgment worthy of the Almighty; and indeed, the punishments thereof are represented to us in the Sacred Scriptures, to be as grievous and as lasting, as those pleasures which are prepared for the recompence and reward of the righteous;—and whether the wicked man will believe there be any such torments reserved for him or not,—he must, in a very short time, be removed from his present state of existence;—and if there be a life after this, and he die in his sins, the eternal punishment and miseries thereof must inevitably be his portion;—and in the mean time, what present gloomy apprehensions must he lie under, what anxieties of mind must he of necessity undergo?—For as he cannot but be conscious to himself, that if there be a hell, it must unavoidably be his unhappy lot, and as he cannot be certain that there is no such thing, he must, whether he will or not, as often as he is cool, and gives himself time to think, be exposed to the severest and most tormenting reflections;—he is sure of nothing with respect to these

never ceasing torments, but that such there may be,—and if there should, he must endure them, alas! to eternal ages.—He would flatter himself, indeed, that 'tis an illusion, and flies to infidelity, as a sanctuary, to screen him from such racking contemplations;—but here the misfortune lies, his disbelief of a deity, will not reduce him to non-existence.—All his vain and fruitless endeavours to smother the reflections of hell, will never damp its unquenchable burnings:—if such things there be, he knows he cannot possibly prevent them;—and for that reason, it is altogether impossible for him, however he may indulge himself in company, or in luxury and excess, to secure himself from those corroding and anxious fears in a sober hour, and in his most private retirements.

BUT above all, when he lies gasping on a death-bed, when he is just entering upon the verge of eternity, when death summons him, for ought he knows to the contrary, to appear before the awful judgment-seat of that Almighty Power, whose existence he denied;—when, in a few moments, perhaps, he must be snatched from hence, and be consigned to that dreadful place of torments which he has laughed at and ridiculed!—What agonies of soul must the poor unbeliever then undergo!—What horrors of mind must he feel at his approaching dissolution! Would he be ingenuous, as some before him have been, he would acknowledge, that one hour of such painful reflection is too great a price to pay for a whole life of sinful and sensual pleasures.

HAVING shewn you the extreme folly of disbelieving a future state, and acting consistently with such infidelity, even upon the supposition that it were precarious whether there will be an hereafter or not; I shall now proceed to shew you, that the
Providence

Providence of God must, beyond all contradiction, extend to a future state; since otherwise, his permission of the wicked to flourish, and meet with success in all their undertakings, and of the righteous to suffer, and be sometimes afflicted both in mind, body and estate, would be inconsistent with his Divine Attributes.

Tho' the law of *Moses*, indeed, contained no express promises of a future state; yet the *Jews* had such natural and moral arguments to convince them of so great a truth, that it was the universal belief of all good men, and particularly the Prophets of old, and other Saints, who lived long before our Saviour came into the world to confirm this important doctrine.

THE *Jews* were very well assured, by the many indulgent promises and severe menaces of their law, and by the visible execution of justice in the most open and publick manner, that the Almighty was good to *Israel*;—that he affectionately loved, and would infallibly reward all such as obeyed his laws, and would severely punish all those who presumed to live in the constant and open violation of them;—from whence they very justly concluded, that such of God's servants, who, instead of meeting with success in the world, were not only treated with the utmost ignominy and contempt, but were persecuted for righteousness sake, should, at a day appointed for retribution, be amply recompenced for all the numerous sorrows and troubles, which they laboured under in this life;—and that such of God's professed and implacable enemies, who escaped punishment in this world, should be reserved for more terrible vengeance in the world to come.

THAT this was the general opinion of the Sacred Penmen of the *Old Testament*, is evident from what

what we find recorded for our instruction in the seventy-third Psalm.—Holy David complains there, in very pathetic terms, of the prosperity of the wicked.—*My feet, says he, were almost gone,—my steps had well nigh slipped;—for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.—For there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm.—They are not in trouble like other men,—neither are they plagued like other men.—And yet these prosperous men, for the generality at least, were a set of profligate wretches, who were not only tyrants and oppressors of the poor, but impious contemners of the Supreme Being, and professed unbelievers of his Divine Providence.—Therefore pride compasseth them about like a chain, and violence covereth them like a garment;—they set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh thro' the earth; and they say, how doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most high?—And yet these were they, who flourished and prospered in the world, whose eyes swelled with fatness, and who did even what they listed.—Behold these, says the Psalmist, are the ungodly, that prosper in the world, and increase in riches.—And since matters stand thus, what motives are there to induce mankind to shew any regard for a religious course of life;—to set apart any portion of their time for acts of devotion; when such vile, profligate, and abandoned wretches are possessed of all the enjoyments this life can afford them, and are treated with all the testimonies of the highest esteem and veneration;—whilst those, who make a conscience of serving their Maker, and study day and night to fulfil his Divine Will, are so far from meeting with any favour or indulgence from their superiors, that they are treated with the utmost ignominy and contempt?—Upon this, the Psalmist closes*

closes this grand objection with this remarkable reflection; if this be the case, *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.*

As the Psalmist has thus stated the matter, and represented the objection on both sides, in very pathetic terms, let us observe the manner in which he obviates and reconciles it.—In the beginning of this expostulation with the Almighty, he lays this down as a principle that will admit of no question or debate, namely, that God is good to *Israel*, even to such as are of a clean heart.—And when this point is once acknowledged, that God is just and righteous, and good to all those who serve and obey him, the difficulty will immediately vanish:—for tho' 'tis undoubtedly true, that the wicked sometimes are not only permitted to live, but die likewise in the full fruition of all the good things of this life; *They shall, notwithstanding, perish in the grave, like sheep; death shall feed on them, and the righteous have dominion over them in the morning*; that is to say, in a future state, when both the righteous and the wicked shall rise out of their graves, in order, as our text observes, *that the one may be comforted, and the other tormented.*

To sum up the whole matter, if then it be an act of the most flagrant folly, even for such as are not convinced of a future state, not to believe that there will be a day of retribution, how egregiously stupid and foolish must they be, who, tho' they profess it as an article of their faith, yet live as if they thought it to be an illusion only? If speculative infidelity be folly, the practice of it can be nothing less than downright madness. Let us then never contradict, but shew our faith by our works.

As we all here present acknowledge a Supreme Being, let us not give the lie to our profession,
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by disbelieving those important and mysterious truths, which he has revealed to us in the Sacred Scriptures, by ridiculing those lively Oracles, blaspheming God's Holy Name, prophaning the Sabbath-Day, contemning all acts of devotion, both public and private, and acting in open violation of his most Sacred Laws: but let us, on the contrary, pay an awful reverence to, and shew the highest veneration for, every thing on which his name is called, by making it our whole study and employment to promote his glory, and to contribute, as much as in us lies, to the strict and punctual observance of his Divine Will here upon earth, as we are well assured it is, in the most acceptable manner, done in heaven.

AGAIN, as we all profess to believe a Divine Providence that governs the world, and superintends all our actions, tho' performed ever so much in the dark, and concealed from human sight, let us not act inconsistently with that belief, and indulge ourselves in the commission of any known sin, tho' ever so agreeable to our depraved and vicious inclinations, and say to ourselves, — *Peradventure the darkness shall cover us*; but let us do every thing in the presence of that God, with whom the darkness is no darkness, and the night is as clear as the noon-day.

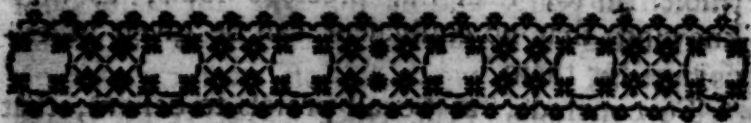
AGAIN, as we all profess to believe, that we have immortal souls, which, in a future state, will be either happy or miserable, according to our works here upon earth, which is our day of probation; let us not contradict this belief, by indulging ourselves in every act of intemperance and excess, and looking with the utmost earnestness and attention, after all the gratifications of sense; but let us shew a generous contempt of all temporal delights, and determine, with the aid and assistance

assistance of the Divine Grace, rather to lose the whole world, than our precious souls, as well-knowing, that no equivalent can be given in exchange for them.

To conclude, as we all profess to believe, that God has appointed a day to judge mankind, let us not act inconsistent with that belief, by neglecting to make a due preparation for his coming, and acting, as if we never expected he would call us to account; but let us, on the contrary, behave ourselves as those, who wait with impatience for the arrival of their Lord, and live in a stedfast hope of hearing upon that solemn day, those comfortable words pronounced in our favour, namely, *Come, ye blessed Children of my father, inherit the kingdom, prepared for you from the beginning of the world.* Amen.



SUNDAY



SUNDAY II.

* * The Duty of serving God.

JOSHUA XXIV, 24.

And the people said unto Joshua, the Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.



WHEN Joshua had brought the Israelites into the land of Canaan; and put them into the quiet possession of all the good things of this life wherewith it abounded; he made it his first and principal concern, being conscious of their unaccountable propensity to the worship of idols, to establish and confirm them in the true religion, that is to say, in the service of that Supreme Being, who had, by his Almighty arm, stretched forth in their favour, brought them out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage, into a land, which flowed, as we are told, with milk and honey.

AND

AND now, finding himself very infirm, and well stricken in years, and having too just reasons for entertaining some jealous apprehensions, that after his decease, they would fall off from their allegiance to the one True God, and serve the Gods, which their fore-fathers did on the other side, the flood, and in *Egypt*; he, like a tender and indulgent patriot, considers within himself, what measures were the most prubable to meet with success; what course he had best to take, in order to keep them stedfast and immoveable in those principles, which he had from time to time impressed upon their minds, and to which they had listened, at least, to all outward appearance, with the utmost attention.

AND in order to accomplish this generous, this praise-worthy design, he convenes a general assembly, and therein represents to them, in a very well concerted and pathetic speech, the miraculous manner, in which the Almighty had driven out the nations before them, tho' much greater and stronger than themselves, and had settled them in the peaceable possession of that land; which he had promised them.

FOR which reason, he tells them, that in point of gratitude, were there no other motive to engage them, they ought to be upon their guard, *to take heed to their ways, to love the Lord their God with all their hearts, and with all their minds, and with all their strength, and to serve him, and him only.*

THO' this motive alone, one would imagine, should prevail on them to look upon the false Gods of their neighbours, with an eye of the utmost abhorrence and detestation; yet, as if he was still jealous of their conduct, he summons the whole twelve tribes of *Israel* once more together; and

and in a full convocation, lays before them a succinct account of the numberless blessings which the Almighty had thought fit to shower down upon them, and their fore-fathers, from the days of his faithful servant *Abram*, whom he had selected from amongst his idolatrous relations, down to the very time of their present solemn assembly.

FROM the serious consideration therefore, of the Almighty's paternal tenderness, and regard for them, he implores them all in general, in the most affectionate terms, to keep firm and stedfast in the true Religion which they then professed; that from thenceforth, they would forever abandon the thoughts of false Gods, and serve the Lord only in sincerity and truth.

HERE, as an artful orator, he stops short, and leaves them at last to their own free choice:—But, says he, *if it seems evil unto you*, (upon mature deliberation) *to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom you will serve, whether the Gods whom your Fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell.*

THIS, doubtless, was a master-piece of rhetorick, and a very comprehensive, as well as artful insinuation. He did not thereby intend to intimate, that Mankind were at their own option to serve what God they pleased, but that no compulsion ought to be used in a concern of so great importance. *If (says he) it seems evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom ye will serve:—* which is the same thing, in effect, as if he had said.—“ If after all the undeniable testimonies “ which the Almighty has condescended to give “ you of his peculiar presence among you, and “ of his being your rock of defence against your “ most powerful enemies; if, after all the most “ solemn

October 1703 Thomas Corventry

Marriage of Mankind Church this in remark

of their Marriage

“ solemn ties and obligations, which he has
“ thought fit thus to lay you under, by miracu-
“ lously delivering you out of the hands of
“ merciless tyrants and oppressors, you can think
“ fit, without the least acknowledgement of such
“ signal favours, to abandon the worship and
“ service of the true God, and instead thereof can
“ slavishly submit to fall prostrate before sense-
“ less stocks and stones, the work of mens hands,
“ then take your choice ; — but I conceive a
“ much better opinion of you ; and am persuad-
“ ed, that no one, in this august assembly, can
“ entertain so abject, so ungrateful a Thought.—
“ I am very well assured, that I have offered the
“ best religion in the world to your serious con-
“ sideration, and I flatter myself, that you will
“ all, with one heart, and with one consent, with-
“ out the least diffidence or distrust, adhere to
“ it.”

WHEREUPON the whole congregation, to testify their universal applause and approbation of this important advice, thus solemnly given them by their religions lawgiver, cried out, with an audible Voice, “ *God forbid, that we should forsake the Lord to serve other Gods!*”—and immediately afterwards made the solemn resolution, in the words of our text, *the Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.*

HAVING thus explained (with as much brevity as possible) the occasion of this pious determination of the people of *Israel* ; that which I would infer from it, is this general proposition ; namely, that a right, and conscientious service of the true God, and a chearful obedience to his voice, are the surest means, not only to promote our peace and happiness in this world, but to secure our salvation in the world to come.—This was the ground of the *Israelites* solemn engagement to *Joshua*, and the very same confidence may all thole raise to themselves,

themselves, who build their hopes on the same wise and solid foundation.

PERMIT me to recommend this resolution of theirs to your imitation, and shew you the happy consequences that will attend such a daily and conscientious discharge of your duty towards that God, *in whom you live, move, and have your being.*

IN this promise, or solemn engagement, therefore, of *serving the Lord, and obeying his voice*, there are two things of the highest importance very plainly implied.

FIRST, a sincere and unfeigned belief of, and a firm and ready assent to, these two great Attributes of the only true and living God; namely, that he is an Omnipotent, and Omniscient Being.

AND secondly, a practical application of such assent or belief to the future conduct and regulation of our lives.

FIRST, a hearty belief of, and a firm assent to those two great Attributes of the only true and living God; namely, that he is an Omnipresent, and Omniscient Being.

I SHALL not here endeavour to give you a detail of the various conjectures of some presumptuous men, who have indulged their curiosities too far, with respect to their researches into these two mysterious Attributes of the divine Essence, nor aim at resolving the vain, and no ways edifying enquiries of others, who are wise above what is written, and are fond of knowing more of the Almighty than he has thought fit to discover of himself; but shall endeavour to give you such ideas only of those his divine perfections, as his holy Spirit has thought fit to reveal to us in the sacred Scriptures, *which is the only light, that truly shines, or can direct us in such dark and abstruse researches.*

AND, in the first place, let us listen with attention to what God himself is pleased to say, in relation

relation to his Omnipresence, by the mouth of his holy Prophets.—In *Isaiab*, we find, that the Lord himself saith, *The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool*: and again, in *Jeremiah*, we have this remarkable interrogatory.—*Do not I fill heaven and earth*, saith the Lord? Now the terms *heaven and earth* (in the language of the sacred Scriptures) frequently signify the spacious universe, and every part of it.—Thus, *Moses* (in the introduction to his history of the creation) has these words—*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*,—that is to say, the whole world,—and all beings, of what nature or kind soever, that are contained therein. And in the same sense, our blessed Saviour himself makes use of the very same terms:—*Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled*;—that is to say, till the whole frame and fabrick of the world shall be dissolved. Again, we find, in the *Psalms* of the prophet *David*, the following elegant exclamation. *Whither, O Lord, shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there;—if I make my bed in Hell, behold thou art there: If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me; or, if I say, the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me.*—Since then, there is no place so high, or deep, no place so dark or distant, but the Almighty is present in it; we learn thus much of this his particular Attribute, that he fills every place, and yet is comprehended in none.—*Will God, indeed, says Solomon, dwell on the earth? Behold! the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain him.*

LET us again search the Scriptures, in order to form the best idea we can of God's Omniscience.—And here we may conclude, that since all his perfections are infinite, his ways must of necessity

ty be widely different from ours ; that he does not know things after that weak and imperfect manner in which we trace them ; but, that *all things are naked and open*, as the Apostle St. Paul expresses it,—*to the eyes of him, with whom we have to do.*

All events, and all occurrences, of what nature or kind soever, and in what place, how near or remote soever they may happen, or how publicly or privately soever they may be transacted, are equally known unto him. *Am I a God at hand*, saith the Lord, *and not a God a-far off ?*

He not only knows what has been done in times past, and what is actually transacting at present, but is as familiarly conversant with every event that will come to pass in future ages. We find, the Almighty, in the Book of *Isaiab*, challenging the heathen Gods upon this particular point.—*Prosecute your cause*, saith the Lord ; *bring forth your strong reasons.*—*Let them bring forth, and shew us what shall happen ; shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods.* And St. James ascribes to God this foreknowledge of future events. *Known to God*, says he, *are all his works from the beginning of the world.*

He is not only acquainted with all future contingences of the last and highest importance, such as the change of governments, and the *revolutions* of states : *He ruleth*, saith the prophet *Daniel*, *in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will* ; but his knowledge extends, even to the minutest, and most trivial occurrences that can possibly be conceived ; *not a sparrow falls to the ground without him*, and the *very hairs of our head are all numbered.*

AGAIN, not only all natural occurrences, but whatever proceeds from rational and free agents, is equally known unto him. *Can any man hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him*, saith the

the Lord? *The Lord looks from heaven, as the Psalmist tells us, and beholds all the sons of men, —he considereth all their works;—*nay, he not only knows to perfection every word that we speak, but the most secret sentiments of our very souls; *There is not a word in my tongue, says David, but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether. Thou, Lord, understandst my thoughts afar off.*

THOUGH all this may startle our weak reason; yet she will inform us, that, with regard to the divine Attributes, it is a duty incumbent on us to stand astonished at what the most intelligent, finite being can have no adequate idea of; and that, instead of prying with too much curiosity into such dark and mysterious truths, it would much better become us to cry out with the Apostle St. Paul, —*O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!—How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!—For who hath known the mind of the Lord; or who hath been his counsellor?*

HAVING thus given you a succinct, but scriptural account of these two great Attributes of the Deity, I mean, of his Omnipresence and Omniscience, I shall conclude this discourse with a short practical application. If therefore, we will resolve, with the *Israelites, to serve the Lord, and obey his voice*, we must not only believe, that in whatever place we are, we have him always before us, but to demean ourselves in such a serious and devout manner, as becomes persons who are conscious of their being in his awful presence; not only to believe, that all our actions are naked and open to his view, but to use our utmost endeavours, that every thing we do, may meet with his approbation and be acceptable in his sight.

AND, in order to induce us to the practice of our duty towards this all-seeing and omniscient

Being, I shall consider him, first, as a holy law-giver, who has laid down good and righteous rules for the regulation of our deportment.

SECONDLY, I shall consider him, as one who observes our dutiful demeanour, and perfect obedience to his divine Laws, with an exact and curious eye.

AND thirdly, I shall consider him, not only as a munificent benefactor of all those who serve him in sincerity and truth, and are obedient to his voice; but as a severe and awful avenger of all such as presume to act and live in the open violation of his divine Laws, and instead of serving him, think of nothing but the gratification of their sensual appetites.

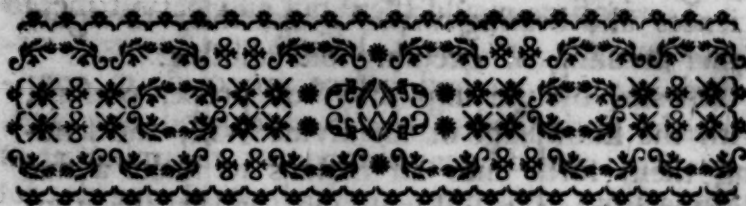
IN the first place then, I am to consider this omnipresent and omniscient God as a holy law-giver, who has laid down sufficient directions for our future conduct and deportment.

AND in this light he is represented to us in the sacred Scriptures. — *The Lord*, says the prophet *Isaiah*, *is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver*: — And *St. James* assures us, *that there is one lawgiver, that is able to save and to destroy*. — Now, this great law-giver has prescribed rules for the regulation of our conduct and demeanour two several ways. — *First*, by implanting in our hearts, when he first created us, a general idea of good and evil, whereby we might pursue the one, and avoid the other: — and this falls under the denomination of the Law of nature, to which, *St. Paul* refers, in his Epistle to the *Romans*, where he tells them, — *when the Gentiles, which have not the Law*, (that is to say, have no sacred Scriptures, — no Revelation of the divine Will to guide or direct them) *do yet by nature the things contained in the Law, these, having not the Law, are a Law to themselves, which shew the work of the Law written in their hearts*: — And this Law is sufficient to convince those who
indulge

indulge themselves in the violation of it, that they are guilty of a very flagrant offence, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts either accusing or excusing one another.

Secondly, by the inspiration of proper persons, with the knowledge of his divine Will, and sending them forth into all nations to make a due discovery of it to all mankind, and what is thus communicated to them by persons so duly qualified, is termed, in a peculiar manner, his *revealed Law*. And this superior Law, we have comprised in the Books of the *Old and New Testament*, though somewhat more particularly in the *New*,—wherein we have the most absolute and compleat revelation of his divine Will, which he has made by his dearly beloved and only begotten Son, our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has perfected the moral Law, and brought life and immortality to light; who has condescended so far, as to give us a fuller and more clear explication of it, has extended its directive power much farther, and enforced its obligations with greater strength.—It must be acknowledged, that this is a perfect Law indeed, which extends, not only to our words and actions, but to the very secret recesses of our souls, exacting from us all, an unaffected sincerity and purity of heart, and proposing to us, on the one hand, the most glorious rewards, to engage and induce us to a ready obedience to the divine Will; and on the other, the severest punishments that can possibly be conceived, to deter us from a presumptuous transgression of it.

I should now proceed to the second point proposed; namely, to consider God, as an exact and curious observer of all our actions;—but, as I propose to expatiate somewhat largely on that article, I shall reserve the prosecution of it to my next discourse.



SUNDAY III.

* * The Duty of serving God.
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JOSHUA XXIV, 24.

And the people said unto Joshua, the Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.



HAVING given you, in my last discourse on these words, as just and adequate idea as possibly I could, of the Omnipresence and unerring Wisdom of the Supreme Being, I therein promised to consider him, first, as a holy law-giver, who had laid down the best and plainest rules for the regulation of our deportment. Secondly, as one, who observed, not only our actions, but the very thoughts of our hearts, with an exact and curious eye. And lastly, as a rewarder of all those who paid an awful regard to his divine Laws, and a severe avenger of all such as should presume to live in the contempt of them, and instead of serving

ing their Maker, think of nothing but the sinful gratification of their sensual appetites.

As my time would then but just permit me to prosecute my first head, I shall now proceed, according to the method before proposed, to consider the great God of the *Israelites*, and our God, as a strict and diligent observer of the minutest of our actions, but more particularly of our dutiful deportment towards him, with regard to his most holy Laws.

THE Holy Spirit frequently vouchsafes, in condescension to our infirmities, to intimate to us, that the Almighty not only overlooks all our actions, how secret soever, and observes, with the utmost strictness, our deportment towards him, with respect to our obedience and submission to his divine Will;—but records them, with their particular circumstances, in the *Book* of his *Remembrance*.—The Prophet *Malachi* assures us, that as to the good works, and virtuous behaviour of the righteous, *they that feared the Lord spake often one to another*; that is to say, frequently assembled together, and entertained each other with such serious discourse, as tended to the everlasting salvation of their precious and immortal souls; *and the Lord bearkened and heard it; and a Book of Remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name*.—And as the Almighty is thus exact and punctual in setting down the virtuous actions of all good men, that they may hereafter reap the benefit and advantage of their truth and fidelity;—so will he be no less curious and exact in recording the transgressions of the wicked, in order to their everlasting condemnation.

I COME now, in the last place, to consider this God of the *Israelites*, and our God, as a munificent benefactor to all those who resolve to serve him in spirit and in truth, and to make it the business of their

their lives to obey his voice ; and as a tremendous and severe judge to condemn and punish all those who demean themselves like stubborn and undutiful children, and act without remorse, in open violation of his divine Laws : for 'tis in order that he may deal with us impartially, and consistent with his divine Mercy and vengeance, that he watches with so strict an eye, and enters down into his Book, in so exact a manner, and in such indelible characters, not only every action, but every thought of man's heart, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.—*I the Lord* (says the Prophet *Jeremiah*, *search the heart* ; —*I try the reins*.—And what is the wise purpose and design of all this enquiry ? Why, even to give to every man according to the fruit of his doings.—And *St. Paul* assured the *Romans*, that he will observe the very same method at the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, when he will render to every man according to his deeds ; to them, who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, and eternal life ; but unto them that are contentious, and do not buy the truth, but obey unrighteousness ; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil ; but glory, honour and peace to every man that worketh good.

WHEN we have thus duly considered the Almighty, as a holy law-giver, as an omnipresent and all-wise Being, and as a just and impartial judge, and one that is incapable of erring ; we must consider him, with respect to all other occurrences, as the sole governor and director of them all. We must firmly believe, and conclude, without the least diffidence or hesitation, that every event, how important or trivial soever, is the result of his wise counsel, and not the effects of blind chance, or unintelligent necessity ; that every accident of life, which befalls either ourselves, or any of the inferior part of his creation, is what he hath ordained,

ordained, and thought most proper and convenient to permit, and 'tis a duty for ever incumbent on us, to imagine, that tho' his ways are not like our ways, and seem to us very dark and intricate; yet, in reality, that he orders and disposes all things for the best, with the greatest views, and to the wisest ends and purposes, namely, his own glory, and the eternal benefit and advantage of all those who, with the house of *Israel*, join in a firm and unshaken resolution *to serve the Lord their God, with all their strength, with all their might, and with all their soul;—and to obey his voice, and to serve no other Gods but him,* according to his own commandment.

HAVING thus endeavoured to shew you, in as brief a manner as possible, what an exalted idea you ought to entertain of the only true God, and of him with whom only you have to do, and on whom, not only your temporal, but eternal happiness entirely depends; I shall close this discourse, with giving you some short directions, with respect to the manner of your future deportment towards him, that your services may prove acceptable in his sight, and that at the great and solemn day, when his Son shall come in righteousness to judge the whole world, you may be ranked amongst that happy number, to whom he shall give that comfortable invitation, mentioned in the Gospel; *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world.*

THO' it cannot be supposed, neither is it indeed required, that every moment of our lives should be employed in one uninterrupted contemplation on the divine Attributes, and in the actual application of our belief of them to every action of no moment or importance; yet in order to our serving

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ing the Lord in sincerity and truth, and being obedient to his voice, we must, in the first place, live under such an habitual sense of the Almighty's infinite perfections, as may have a sufficient effect on our conduct in general, and induce us to have a watchful eye over such of our actions as are of greater moment; as are either of a heinous and sinful nature, or such as are matter of duty highly necessary and incumbent on us, as creatures entirely dependent on that Supreme Being, to whom we owe our existence. But forasmuch as confirmed habits are never to be procured, or kept up, but by frequent repetition of the same thing, it will be highly requisite, in order to our obtaining and preserving in our minds an habitual sense of God's infinite perfections, that some certain and stated times should be appointed, and set apart for a serious and devout contemplation of them.

AND surely there is no one, how requisite soever his daily labour may be for the support of himself and his family, and may seem to render the neglect of it in some measure excusable, but will chearfully devote one hour, at least, in the return of four and twenty, for this religious purpose. But what excuse can possibly be made for those, to whom the Almighty has been profuse, if I may be indulged the expression, of his divine Favours, and blest them, not only with the necessities, but all the comforts and conveniencies of this life; and has planted them in so happy a situation, that they have not the least room *to take a thought for what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or wherewithal they shall be clothed?*—but with shame and confusion of face, however, it must be acknowledged, that there are too many, who never employ one moment of their precious and invaluable time, to any other purpose than to indulge

dulge their lusts, and give a loose to their inordinate desires. Can they have the least shadow of a pretence to get off from such a religious engagement?—And yet were this poor pittance, this small portion of time but rightly employed, and laid out to the best advantage by every one, I dare venture to affirm, that the world would be much better than it is, and that prophaneness and immorality would not run thro' our streets, as it does at present, like an impetuous torrent.

THAT small portion, therefore, of the day which should be appropriated and set apart for *lifting up our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help*, should doubtless be the morning, when first we awake.—'Tis highly requisite, that when the Almighty (as the *Psalmist* expresses it) *has been about our beds all night*, he should be the first object of our waking thoughts; and that we should converse with him, before any of our friends have admittance to us, or before we engage in, or enter upon any secular or temporal affairs. Such a practice as this, would most assuredly have a happy influence over our deportment through the whole day :—Such a practice as this would be the most probable method for begetting and maintaining in us an habitual sense of the divine Blessings, from time to time conferred upon us.—But, as we ought thus every day to devote some small portion of our time to the service of the great Author of our being; so ought we more especially to make our applications to him on all extraordinary occasions, that is to say, in time of divine Worship, and in all signal occurrences, whether very fortunate, or, in a more than common manner unsuccessful.

AND first, in divine Worship, either public or private; if in the latter, we ought to consider, that

that although our closets be locked, yet our Father, which is in heaven, however retired we may be, sees all that we do in secret ; that he lends an ear to our mental devotions, that every motion of our hearts are naked and open to his view ;—if in the former, we are then to consider, that where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he will be in the midst of them :—that he knows perfectly well our most secret intentions, with what particular designs, and out of what principles and motives we approach his sacred Temple ; whether out of obedience and submission to his divine Will, and with a sure and certain hope of a Blessing on our pious endeavours to please him, and render ourselves acceptable in his sight, or whether out of any secular views, and the vain expectation of some temporal advantage, that he sees through our disguise, and very well knows whether the motions of our hearts accompany those of our lips ; whether we listen to the blessed doctrines of the Gospel, with an intent to imbibe and practise them in our lives and conversations ; or whether we attend the Church out of formality only, in order to gratify some curiosity, or spend our time in making trivial observations on the gay part of the Assembly, whilst the ministers of the Lord, are reading or expounding to us the sacred Scriptures ; whether we approach his altar with due reverence, and a tender regard for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, and instituted the blessed Sacrament in commemoration of his Body that was given, and his Blood that was shed for the remission of our transgressions ; or else, out of some self-interested, sinister designs, and worldly considerations, thereby prostituting the ordinance of God to the service of Satan.

AGAIN,

AGAIN, we ought, in a particular manner, to make our humble addresses to the throne of grace, when we meet with any remarkable events, which influence and affect our minds with any greater degree than ordinary, either of transport or confusion.—In adversity, we ought to consider, that afflictions arise not out of the dust, but are sent down upon us by the special appointment, or by the wise permission of that Supreme Being, who sees our unhappy situation, and knows perfectly well what state and condition is, in reality; best for us, who can wipe away all tears from our eyes, whenever he thinks most convenient, can sustain us under the violence of any temptation or trial, how severe soever, and can direct the issue of them to our everlasting benefit and advantage.—In prosperity, we are to turn our eyes upwards, to look above second causes, and acknowledge our success dependent on God alone; to reflect, that he has been pleased to shower down his blessings on us beyond our deserts, that he sees what use we make of his acts of indulgence towards us, and, in short, whether we employ them to the honour and glory of the Donor, or squander them away in the service of *Mammon*, and his adherents.

AND thus, by spending our days in such an habitual sense of Gods infinite perfections, as may influence and effect our future deportment, especially our actions of moment; we may truly imitate the laudable example of the house of *Israel* in my text, and as firmly resolve to serve the Lord our God, as they did,—to obey his voice, and to look down with an eye of contempt and detestation on the service of all other Gods.

FROM what has been said, you must of necessity infer the happy influence, and effect such an habitual practice as this would have upon you,
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not only in the particular cases beforementioned, but in that state and condition of life which Providence should allot you, whether easy or grievous.

WHAT temptations, on the one hand, how advantageous soever, can prevail with any one to be guilty of a known sin, who considers himself in the presence of an all-seeing and an avenging God, who has not only commanded him to desist from such evil practices, but will most assuredly, without a sincere contrition and sorrow for them, eternally punish him for the commission of them? In vain does the sinner wait for darkness to cover him; since whatever he does at midnight, and in his closet, is as open and naked to the eye of the Almighty, as if it had been done at noon-day, or upon the house-top.

AND, on the other hand, what hardships and troubles, what dangers and difficulties, can terrify, or dissuade that person from the strict service of God, who lives under an habitual sense of his all-searching eye?—Tho' we must expect to meet with crosses and disappointments, in our christian warfare; yet we must wrestle and fight boldly, not only against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places.—But let the corruptions of our own depraved natures be ever so strong; let the enemies of the righteous, be ever so numerous; yet they can never want encouragement, or resolution to oppose them, when they know, that the living God espouses their cause, and will, in spite of all opposition, enable them at last to come off triumphant.

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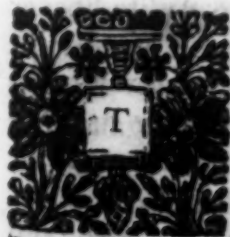


SUNDAY IV.

Concerning the Happiness of good Men
after this Life.

I COR. II. 9.

*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have
entered into the heart of man, the things
which God hath prepared for them that love
him.*



O give a lively and clear idea of those pleasures which God has reserved for the recompence and reward of the righteous would be too difficult an attempt for the most elevated mortal uninspired; for certain it is, that infinite wisdom and goodness may with ease contrive such instances of everlasting felicity, as the heart of man cannot possibly conceive, and of which he can have no other than a very faint and imperfect idea, till his mortal frame shall have put on immortality, and till by that means he shall become duly qualified to enjoy it.

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HOWEVER, as some knowledge, be it ever so imperfect, of those ineffable joys may be supposed to quicken us in our race to that celestial goal; sober and serious reflections on that uninterrupted felicity which the Almighty has declared shall be the everlasting portion of the righteous, when they shall have arrived into his heavenly kingdom, must, doubtless, if hearkened to with due attention, have a very good effect on our future lives; for tho' our finite understandings are incapable of entertaining any perfect ideas of that infinite state of bliss; yet from the sacred Scriptures we may find such a description of their reality and eternal duration, as may give us a sufficient satisfaction for the present; may serve to inflame our hearts with the most ardent devotion; and create in us, a perfect thirst, and longing after immortality.

Not only our text, but numberless other passages that are interspersed throughout the writings of the inspired Penmen, demonstrate, beyond all contradiction, that the most rapturous enjoyments which our natures are capable of here on earth can bear no manner of proportion to those of another life; since the former, how exquisite soever for a few moments, are precarious and uncertain, soon cloy after possession, and have a tincture in them of evil as well as good; of sorrow as well as joy. So fluctuating and inconstant are they, that we have no manner of security for their duration even of an hour; they are like a shadow, and in a moment vanish out of sight: when we think ourselves most safe in the possession of them, even then they glide from us we know not how, and too soon convince us of our folly and delusion.

WERE the enjoyments, however, of this life ever so certain; yet the satisfaction that flows from them is far from being perfect. This is what

Solomon

Solomon calls *vanity of vanities*. Every occurrence is capable of creating us uneasiness; but nothing we can do, nothing that can befall us, can give us any perfect or substantial pleasure. 'Tis hardly to be accounted for, but either our appetites are so fantastical, or the good things of this life are such illusions, that we are never easy either with or without them.

If we are hungry, we are in pain; but then, if we indulge our appetites too far, we are more in pain than we were before. If we are poor, we look upon ourselves as miserable; and when we once attain to those treasures which our ambition has been grasping at, we perchance commence misers, and become more miserable, and less contented than we were before. In short, the enjoyments of this life are so far from affording us any real and solid satisfaction, that the most alluring are most apt to cloy and create disgust.

Now on the contrary, the pleasures of another life will not only give us ample satisfaction, but that satisfaction will never diminish; each repetition of them will be accompanied with a new pleasure and contentment; and the chief ingredients of this happiness, so far as the Scripture hath thought fit to reveal it to us, are the perfection of our knowledge, the height of our love, and the perpetual society and friendship of all the blessed inhabitants of the celestial mansions; and the joyful concurrence of all these, in chearful expressions of gratitude, in the incessant praises and admiration of the fountain and author of all this happiness. And what can be more delightful, than to have our understandings entertained with a clear sight of the best and most perfect being, with the knowledge of all his works, and of the wise designs of his providence here in the world, than to

live in the reviving presence of God, and to be continually attending upon him, whose favour is life, and whose glory is much more above that of any of the princes of this world, than the greatest of them is above the meanest of his subjects? We are not however to imagine, that the happiness of another world is confined to a perpetual gazing upon God, and a simple contemplation of the glories of the heavens; for tho' by that blessed sight we shall doubtless be infinitely transported; yet the sacred Scriptures farther assure us, that we shall be transformed into the image of the divine perfections; we shall not only see God, but we shall be like unto him: and what greater happiness can possibly be conceived, than that of bearing a resemblance to the happiest and most perfect of all beings? Besides, who can tell what employment God may possibly find for us in the next life? We need not doubt, but that he, who is happiness itself, and hath promised to make us like himself, can never be at a loss to find out such occupations for us in the other world, as will be every way equal, and suitable to that high and important station to which he has advanced us.

WHEN we come to heaven, we shall enter into the society of the blessed angels, and of the spirits of just men made perfect; we shall be freed from all those little passions and infirmities which whilst here on earth render the conversation even of the most virtuous men sometimes disagreeable to their companions; we shall then meet with all those illustrious personages, those heroic minds, those innocent and charitable souls, whom we have either seen and conversed with, or ever read of in history. There we shall meet, not only with many of our nearest and dearest relations, and many of our most intimate and affectionate friends,
but

but in all probability with many of our enemies, to whom we shall then be perfectly reconciled; notwithstanding all the warm debates and peevish controversies which possibly we may have maintained with them in this world. For heaven is a state of perfect harmony and uninterrupted friendship: no dissensions can ever arise in that happy region: nothing but kindness and good nature can be exerted there; all the arts of fond persuasion; all the prudent methods of rendering conversation intirely agreeable to each other will constantly be practised there: and what greater happiness can be conceived, than that of conversing freely with so many illustrious personages, without the least tincture of folly or deceit, of jealousy or design upon one another? No spark of avarice or ambition; no degree of anger or moroseness, which so frequently interrupt the pleasures and repose of mankind, can possibly subsist in those happy mansions.

AND when this blessed society shall all be assembled together, and thus happily united, they shall all join with one consent to utter their most grateful thanksgivings to the Almighty for all his works of wonder; for the effects of that infinite goodness, that unerring wisdom, and almighty power which are clearly seen in the creation of the world, and the good conduct observed in the preservation of all things therein; but more particularly for his distinguishing favours conferred on mankind, not only for their bare existence; but for the comfort of their lives, and for all his providential dispensations towards them: and above all, for the redemption of their souls, by the death of his only and dearly beloved Son; for the free remission of all their transgressions; for the gracious assistance of his holy Spirit, and

for his condescending goodness in conducting them safely through all the dangers, the troubles and temptations of an ensnaring world, to the secure possession of that glory and happiness, which then they shall be partakers of, and indispensably bound to praise God for to all eternity. This, this shall be the important employ of the blessed spirits above, and these are the principal ingredients of our happiness which the Scriptures mention. And if there were no other, as there may be ten thousand more for any thing we can tell; yet generous and virtuous minds will easily understand how great a pleasure must needs arise from the improvement of our knowledge, and the free exercise of our love, and from a grateful and perpetual acknowledgment of the greatest benefits that finite creatures are capable of receiving.

THIS happiness will be everlasting; and tho' this be a circumstance only, that does not strictly enter into the nature of our happiness; yet so material a one it is, that all the felicities which heaven itself affords would be imperfect without it. It would strangely damp and allay all our joys, to think that they should one time or other have an end. And the greater our happiness were, the greater concern would it be to us to consider that it must have a period. It would make a man exceeding sorrowful to reflect on parting with such invaluable possessions. If the pleasures of heaven indeed were in any respect like the joys of this world, it were fit they should be of as short duration; for after a little enjoyment they would pall upon our hands, and we should soon grow weary of them. But being so transcendent and inexpressible, they could scarce be deemed a happiness, were they not eternal. God almighty hath been pleased so to order matters, that the vain and empty de-
lights

lights of this world should be temporary, and transient; but that the great and substantial pleasures of the other should be as lasting as they are excellent. For as heaven is an exceeding, so is it an eternal weight of glory: and this is that which crowns the joys of heaven, and banishes every anxious and perplexing thought from the minds of its inhabitants.

O vast eternity! how dost thou swallow up our most serious reflections, and entertain us at once with transport and amazement! This is the very pinnacle of our happiness, upon which we may stand secure, and look down with an eye of contempt upon all things here below; and how diminutive, worthless, and trivial do they appear to us, when compared with the inestimable and endless enjoyments of our future state? But O how vain and thoughtless are those! who, for the trifles of time and the pleasures of sin, which are comparatively speaking but for a moment; can find in their hearts to forfeit an everlasting felicity. Blessed God! why hast thou prepared such a happiness for those, who neither consider, nor seek after it? Why is such a price put into the hands of fools, who have no hearts to make use of it; who fondly chuse to gratify their lusts rather than save their souls; and sottishly prefer the temporary enjoyments of sin before a blessed immortality; an immortality infinitely beyond all human comprehension? We cannot, from the experience of any of those pleasures which we have been acquainted with in this world, frame the least conception of it: so that when we arrive at those mansions of bliss, we shall doubtless, very readily acknowledge, that the felicities and glories of that state infinitely exceed all the descriptions which we have heard of them in this world. For who

can determine how happy he, who is the fountain of all happiness, can make those souls that love and put their trust in him? In this imperfect state we are incapable of a full and complete representation of those glories. We cannot now see God and live. A full description of heaven, and of the pleasures of that state would let in joys upon us too big for our narrow capacities, and too strong for our weak mortality to bear. No sooner, however, shall we enter upon the joys of the other world; but our minds shall be enlightened to that degree, that there will be a wider difference between our ideas and those of the most exalted mortal, than there possibly can be between the thoughts of the most profound philosopher upon earth, and those of an infant or an idiot. No man's mind is now so well framed to understand any thing in this world, as our understandings shall then be qualified for the knowledge of God, and of the things that belong to a future state. In the mean time, let us bless God, that he hath been graciously pleased to reveal so much of this happiness to us, as is necessary to excite and encourage us in our researches after it.

MOREOVER, God hath in his most gracious dispensations towards us been pleased to make this world irksome and uneasy to us, that there might be no sufficient temptation to reasonable and considerate men to take them off from the care and thought of their future happiness; that God and heaven might have no rival here below; that there might be nothing in this world, that might lay any just claim to our affection, or court us with any advantage, in comparison of everlasting life and glory. If we valued heaven in any degree of proportion to what it really deserves, we should take infinitely more pains than we do to attain it.

It. Whenever we take into our consideration the glories that are above, how must we blame our shameful indolence, and condemn our egregious folly, that we are less solicitous about the eternal welfare of our precious souls, than most men are about the health and preservation of their bodies; that we will not labour half so strenuously for an everlasting inheritance, as men generally do for one only of a temporal duration! Let us remember that our eternal happiness now lies at stake. And how should it quicken our endeavours, to have such a reward set before us? — Would we but often represent to our minds the glories of another world, how should we feel our hearts glow within us? We should be all life, and spirit, and should execute God's will almost with the same readiness and alacrity as the angels themselves. The consideration of heaven, and the firm persuasion of our future happiness should actuate all the powers of our souls, and be continually inspiring us with fresh vigour in the ways of virtue and religion. How should such thoughts as these swell our resolutions, and confirm our purposes of obedience; since, if we have our fruit unto holiness—our end will be everlasting life!

THE incomparably greater good of the life to come, will, with a wise and considerate man, weigh down all the evils of this: for the evils of this life afflict us more or less, according as our souls are fortified with considerations proper to support us under them. When we reflect that we have but a little while to be sojourners here; that we are upon our journey; travelling towards our heavenly country, where we shall meet with all the delights we can possibly desire; surely it ought to give us but very little, if any concern, should we meet with some hardships in our passage, and want some of those accom-

accommodations we might expect at home. This is but the common fate of travellers, and we must bear things patiently, tho' we find they incommode us. These difficulties and Inconveniencies will in a short time be over, and after a few days quite forgotten, and be to us as if they never had been. And when we are safely landed in our own country, with what pleasure shall we look back upon those difficulties which we have so happily surmounted? The more troubles we have passed thro', the kinder treatment we shall find when we arrive at our father's house. When we come to heaven, our happiness shall then be as real as our miseries were here upon earth, and far greater and more lasting. And what great matter is it, tho' we suffer for a while in this world, provided we escape the endless and insupportable torments of the next; tho' we have not our good things in this life, if infinitely greater be reserved for us, and we shall receive them with Interest in the other? Several of the evils and calamities of this life would be insufferable indeed, were there nothing better to be hoped for hereafter. If this were true, men would be of all creatures the most miserable. But our religion hath abundantly convinced us of the contrary; and the assurance of this was that which enabled the primitive christians with undaunted resolution to bear up under the severest afflictions; nay to glory in their tribulation, and to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven, they had a better and more enduring substance.

DID men but firmly believe the rewards of another world, their religion would not be a scene only of outward pomp and parade, but their devotion would be solemn and serious; no man wou'd put on a form of godliness, that was destitute of the power of it. We should do nothing merely to

procure the good opinion of others, but all with respect to God, and our own consciences, and be as cautious and wary of our inward thoughts and most retired actions, as if we were in the presence of the greatest assembly. For in the next life, men shall not be rewarded for what they seemed to be, but for what they really were, in this world. Therefore, whatever we think, or speak, or do, we should always remember, that the day of revelation is coming, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, when all disguises shall be laid aside, and every one's mask shall be taken off, and all our actions and designs exposed to the view of men and angels.

THAT we must all die is as certain, as if an express messenger should come to every one of us from the other world, and tell us so; nothing then can so effectually free us from the fears of death, as to have our imaginations filled with the joys of the blessed saints departed. Death is doubtless terrible to nature, but the terror of it is infinitely increased by the fearful apprehensions of what may follow it. But the comfortable hopes of a blessed immortality relieve the fainting spirits of one just expiring, in an inexpressible manner, and are able, to reconcile us to death, and in a great measure to take away the terror of it. We conceive that the thoughts of death must be gloomy and shocking, even to good men, and that we have never more need of assistance and consolation, than when we are under conflicts with this last enemy, the king of terrors. There is no consideration whatsoever will support a dying man so much in that hour of trial, as the hopes of an happy eternity. He that looks upon death only as a passage to glory, may welcome the messengers of it, as bringing him the best

best and most joyful news, that ever came to him in his whole life; and no one can stay behind in this world with half the comfort that this man leaves it.

To sum up the whole matter, we have told you, that the happiness of good men after this life is infinitely beyond any this world can afford, that it is great in itself, and eternal in its duration, and far above any thing that we can now form the least Idea of.—And now after this, I cannot but be very sensible, that all I have hitherto said falls vastly short of the grandeur and dignity of the subject. So that I could almost begin again, and make a new attempt. And indeed no one would be taken off without some reluctance from so delightful a theme. We are unworthy of heaven, and unfit to partake of so great a glory, if we cannot take pleasure in the contemplation of those things now, the possession whereof shall be our happiness forever.

WITH what joy then should we think of those great and glorious things *which neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of Man to conceive, which God hath prepared for them only that love him?* How should we welcome the thoughts of that happy hour, when we shall make our escape out of these prisons, when we shall pass out of this howling wilderness into the promised land, when we shall be removed from all the troubles and temptations of a wicked and censorious world, when we shall be past all storms, and secured from all further danger of shipwreck, and shall be safely landed in the regions of bliss and immortality!

O BLESSED time! *when all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and death and sorrow shall be no more; when mortality shall be swallowed up of*
life,

life, and we shall enter upon the possession of all that happiness and glory which God hath promised, and our faith hath believed, and our hopes have raised us to the expectation of; when we shall be eased of all our pains, resolved of all our doubts, be purged from all our sins, freed from all our doubts, happy beyond all our hopes, and have all this happiness secured to us beyond the power of time, and the least shadow of an alteration; when we shall know God, and every thing else without any previous meditation, when we shall love him and each other without measure, when we shall serve and praise him without weariness, and obey his will without the least reluctance; when we shall still be more and more delighted in the knowing, loving, praising and obeying of God to all eternity.

How should thoughts like these affect our hearts; and what a mighty influence ought they to have upon our lives! The great disadvantage of the arguments drawn from another world is this, that heavenly things seem at a great distance from us, and are not obvious to our eyes, and therefore are not apt to affect us so strongly, and work so powerfully upon us, as the things of this world.—Now to make amends for this disadvantage, we should often impress these considerations upon our minds, and inculcate upon ourselves their reality and certainty, together with the infinite weight and importance of them. We should reason thus with ourselves; if good men shall be so unspeakably happy, and on the other hand, wicked men so extremely miserable in another world; if these things be true, as they will one day be found so; why should they not be to us as if they were already present?—Why should not I be as much afraid to commit any sin, as if hell

hell were open before me, and I saw the astonishing miseries of the damned? Why should not I be as careful to serve God and keep his commandments, as if heaven were open to my view, and I saw my dear Redeemer standing at the right hand of God inviting me to partake of joys, such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive, glories great and unspeakable, such as God hath prepared for all them that love him.

To which glories, God of his infinite mercy grant that we may be called, thro' the merits and mediation of his son Jesus Christ, to whom with the Holy Ghost be ascribed all might majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. *Amen.*



SUNDAY.



SUNDAY, V.

Of the powerful Influence of a good
Example.

ROMANS XV. 2.

*Let every one of us please his Neighbour, for his
good to edification.*



HERE is nothing, I believe, in this world, that gives mankind a greater disgust to religion, than that false notion of it which they happen to imbibe from their observance of the deportment of too many of those who make the loudest pretensions to it. It will not therefore I conceive, be improper to consider the words of the text as an exhortation, that we should endeavour all we can by our own good conduct to make religion and virtue seem amiable in the eyes of men, whereby we shall most effectually *please our neighbour, for his good to edification.*

VIR-

VIRTUE and goodness appear most amiable when shewn in their native light, without any of that artificial cloathing, wherewith they are commonly dressed up by hypocrites, and such as pretend to more religion than they are really possessed of. If therefore we would gain proselites to virtue and religion, we ought not, at least in our public deportment, to affect any formal and needless austerities; religion should not, as it does in too many, either sour or discompose our tempers, or make us peevish, froward, or ill-natured; we should carry our complaisance to others as far as with a conscience, void of offence, we possibly can; and use our utmost to please all men provided we do not thereby displease the Almighty. We should rather sometimes take part with others in their innocent amusements and recreations, tho' against our own inclination, than by a studious and affected avoidance of them give them occasion to think that religion condemns all manner of diversions. We should rather sometimes even give way to mirth and chearfulness, tho' our own tempers may be naturally grave and phlegmatic, than give them occasion to imagine, that our reserved and unsocial deportment is the result of our religion, and that 'tis an inconsistency for a man to be religious and chearful at the same time. —Thus I say, we should endeavour, as *St. Paul* exhorts us, *to please every man his neighbour, for his good to edification.* We should study all the ways imaginable, as well by our example as discourse, to set religion in the fairest and most advantageous light; we should carefully avoid giving any one room to think, that he cannot be truly religious without bidding adieu to all the innocent enjoyments of this life; or that he cannot be the faithful servant of God, without

rendering himself justly ridiculous to the world, for his humourfome and fantastical singularity.— Thus, I say, we should endeavour, both by our discourse, and by our wise conversation, to beget a true and lovely notion of religion in mens minds; this is the way to adorn our profession; these are the most likely measures we can pursue, to induce our neighbours to embrace it.

For when men shall be convinced, that they may be truly religious, and yet not be always discourfing of religion; that they may be in every respect good men, and yet not be the objects of ridicule for their preciseness; and, in a word, that they may have their conversation in heaven, and yet not be unfit for the conversation of their fellow-creatures here upon earth; it may reasonably be hoped, that such a fair representation of religion as this, will induce a great many to become profelytes to it, and that by thus *striving to please our neighbour*, we shall most effectually procure his good will, and thereby prove instrumental to his *edification*.

In order, therefore, to render this rule truly practicable, I shall reduce it to some particulars, which seem to me necessary to be observed, for the better accomplishment of that end, which we are here taught to make our principal aim and design, namely, *the pleasing our neighbour, for his good to edification*.

FIRST of all then, we should not affect to lead a too solitary or retired life; for how is it possible, that our piety should please our neighbour for his good, if he be not an eye-witness to it? or that our good example should have any influence over him, if we hide it from him?— If therefore it be a duty incumbent on us, by a holy and exemplary life, to endeavour

to bring others to approve of, and imitate the same course that we pursue, it is clearly evident, that our way and method to obtain this end, is not to retire from the society of mankind.—This is so very plain, that to labour in the proof of it would be almost needless; yet since several very pious and truly devout persons, who have spoken and written largely in commendation of a private and solitary life, as if that were the most perfect and divine way of living; whence also they have appointed in popish countries to such as live thus, the denomination of the Religious (by way of eminence) as if all such as were not shut up in a cloister or a cell, were prophane and irreligious, or at least not near so well employed as the others; I think it may not be time mispent for this reason to expatiate a little upon this topick, and to shew, that this solitary and recluse way of living is so far from being more perfect, or more excellent than the other, that 'tis an argument of weakness to make choice of it; and instead of being praise-worthy, is not so much as to be indulged in any but such as are weak. For there is no one virtue practised by those that lead the life of a recluse, but what may also be practised by those who live and converse in the world; besides, they who live in towns and cities, and converse freely and sociably with other men have frequent opportunities of exercising many virtues, which they that live reclusely are, for want of such opportunities, in no capacity of performing.

'Tis true, that he, who lives alone, or a very retired life, having few of those concernments in the world, about which other men are commonly very busily employed, has more time and greater leisure for prayer and meditation, and such like private exercises of devotion; but since we are
not

not born for ourselves only, but the good of others, and have a duty likewise to perform to our neighbours as well as to God, and are obliged by nature and christianity, to have a compassionate regard for others, and consequently to promote their welfare and happiness in this world, and more especially to advance, as far as we are able, their spiritual and eternal good; he that chuses a solitary and retired life, even tho' he lives as well, and does as much good, as 'tis possible for a man to do in that private station; yet while he is diligent in one duty, must neglect, in some measure, another, that is altogether as necessary, or rather more so; for we are told in Scripture, that God will have mercy and not sacrifice, or mercy rather than sacrifice; and therefore there is no manner of reason for this being thought a more excellent or perfect way of living than the other.

It is plain, that our blessed Saviour, one end of whose coming was to set us an example of holy life, and who was undoubtedly the most perfect pattern of holiness that ever appeared in the world, did not cloister up himself, or live retired from the rest of the world, except only at some certain times, when he withdrew from company, for the freer exercise of his devotions.—And that man indeed is too much in company, who is never alone, and too busy, who can spare no time from his secular employments for prayer and meditation. Our Saviour affected not a solitary or inactive life, but went about doing good, and conversing freely with other men, and disdained not the company of the worst of men, when he was in hopes of working out their reformation by freely conversing with them.—Inasmuch, that you know, he was upon this account slandered by his enemies, as a friend of publicans and sinners; and I

would to God we were all such friends to them as he really was! that we would make it our endeavour, as he did, to seek and to save that which is lost! but such friends we cannot be to them, such good we cannot do to them, if we shun all company, and chuse to lead one continued life of retirement.

THUS much indeed must be granted, that 'tis very convenient for such as are weak in the faith, and not well grounded in the principles of their religion; or those, who having been before very much corrupted in this wicked world, have newly undertaken a good life, and so are still in great danger of being drawn away to their former evil courses, by the persuasion and example of their former wicked companions; 'tis, I say, very convenient and adviseable for such as these, to retire, as much as their business will permit them, 'till they shall have confirmed their faith by prayer and consideration; 'till they shall have broken off their bad acquaintance by sufficient absence; 'till they shall have weaned themselves from their old and beloved sins by disuse, and 'till, by a continual exercise of themselves in godliness, they shall be grown up to some strength and perfection therein: but when they shall have well served these purposes by their retirement, their solitude is no longer praise-worthy; 'tis time for them then to go abroad, and to do good; and much more good they may then do abroad, than they can do in a recluse state: and if after this, they still chuse to live in their former retirement, the best thing, I think, that can be said of them is this, that they take up with a lower degree of goodness, when they have a fair opportunity put into their hands of attaining to a greater degree of perfection; and that they do not make such improvement of their talents

lents as they might have done; the consequence of which will be, that they will also fall short, in proportion, of that great reward which they might have attained.

ANOTHER rule or direction requisite to be observed, in order to the edification of our neighbour, and thereby pleasing him to his good, is this; that we should have a peculiar regard to those duties of religion, which are of a publick nature, and proper to be performed in the sight and presence of other men; and that we be strictly regular and constant in the discharge of them.

SUCH especially is the publick worship of God, in those times, and at those places, which are appointed for it; which therefore cannot at proper opportunities be neglected, or without reasonable excuse be omitted, without detriment to our neighbours, as well as ourselves. Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works, says our Apostle to the *Hebrews*, which precept is in sense and effect the same with this in the text, *Let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good to edification*; and then he adds immediately, as one special instance of this duty, the duly frequenting the publick assemblies for the worship of God; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the practice or custom of some is.

AND this they should do well to consider seriously of, who, upon any trifling occasion, and many times upon no occasion at all, absent themselves from church on *Sundays*, and other solemn festivals set apart for divine service.

FOR though they should make use of the very same prayers at home, or in their closets, that are read in the church, and though they should read at home the very same portions of the sacred Scriptures that are read there, and though they should

pass all the rest of the church-time at home in the reading of some good book, which may possibly treat of some good subject that is enforced by the minister in the church, (though I fear there are but very few of those that make a custom of staying from church, who do ordinarily spend their time at home as well as this.) Yet, I say, should they always employ themselves thus at their own private habitations, in the hours of publick worship, in a religious manner; yet this, however, would not be quite so well, as if they had been present at church. For even supposing, that by thus employing themselves at home in the church-time, they might edify themselves as much as they might have done at church, which yet is not true; it is plain, however, that they do not thereby so much edify their neighbours; they may get a great deal of good to themselves by these private exercises of devotion, but they do no good at all thereby to others: their prayers and their reading may profit themselves much, but their example cannot profit the world; their candle, though it burns clear and shines bright, yet being hid thus under a bushel, when it ought to have been set on a candlestick, gives no light to their neighbours. So that in doing in substance all the same things at home, which should have been done at church, they perform their duty but by halves, being at the same time manifestly deficient in that other half, *the edification of their neighbour*.

ANOTHER rule or direction very requisite to be observed, in order to the edifying our neighbour is this, that we contrive the doing of our good deeds before men, that not only the deeds themselves may be seen, but the goodness of them may likewise be conspicuous.

Now

Now the goodness of any work consists in two things—First—in the matter of it, when the thing itself is good, when it is agreeable to the law of God, and when it is a thing that God has commanded to be done.—And secondly, in the mind and intention of the doer, when the reason why he does it, is, because God has commanded it; when he does it out of a principle of obedience to God, and his only, or at least his chief design in the doing it, is to recommend himself to God's gracious acceptance.

Now the first of these, namely, whether the work that we do be materially good, is easy to be known by all that see it: but the second, namely, whether we do it with a good design, and out of a right principle, can be known by men, who can judge only by outward appearance, no farther than we ourselves are pleased to discover to them what our design is in it, and what principle we act upon; and therefore, that the goodness of our work may be rendered conspicuous, it is requisite, that our design and principle should, as far as possible, lie as open to mens view as the action itself.

We ought not therefore to be too bashful, and ashamed, as it were, of owning and professing our religious fear of God; we should never scruple to declare publickly, whenever a proper occasion offers, that conscience towards God is the principle of all our actions; that the reason why we do this or that, or why we do not otherwise, is because we are persuaded, that the one is a duty, or the other a sin; that it is our firm resolution, not willingly to be wanting in any duty, nor knowingly to consent to any sin; and that it is this our steadfast resolution of obedience to the will of God, that influences us in every thing we do, and not temporal interest, or any other worldly considera-

tion whatsoever. This is what ought to be, and this is what, if it really be so, we ought not to be ashamed of, or decline to own; because no action, how good soever in itself, or how publickly soever it be done, is edifying to others, unless it be done, and if there be a proper occasion, be also acknowledged to be done, upon a right principle of religion.

THUS, for instance, if a man, on any publick occasion of charity, should give very largely, but at the same time should declare, that the reason why he gave so much was, because his neighbours of the same quality and degree with himself had deposited the same sum; he would not, in this act of charity, give any example of charity, but only of complaisance, or worldly prudence; for in declaring that he gave so much, only because others had given the same; he does in effect insinuate, that if little had been given by others, he would have given less than he did; and that if others had given nothing, neither would he; and if so, 'tis plain his gift was not a fruit or effect of charity, but only an act of neighbourly compliance; that he did not bestow his benevolence out of pity, or compassion to his necessitous brother, but only to avoid the imputation of avarice; that he did not give, because he thought it was his duty to give, but because he thought it would have been a discredit to him not to have given, as others had done; so that his alms, which, tho' considered in itself, was really a work of charity; yet being given upon these worldly considerations, was neither an act of charity in him, nor an example of charity to others.

OR thus again, if a man that is really sober and temperate, out of duty to God, yet does not acknowledge that this is his principle, and that the
reason

reason why he is always careful to keep himself sober is, because he will not commit a sin; his act of sobriety is no example of that virtue; nay, on the contrary, if, when he refuses to stay longer with those, whom he plainly perceives intend to drown themselves in liquor, he pretends urgent business as the reason of his leaving them so soon; or if, staying still in their company, he nevertheless strenuously refuses to drink with them to excess, pretending only weakness or indisposition of body, as the sole reason of his refusal; in thus leaving them, or thus refusing to keep the round with them, he is so far from giving to others an example of temperance, that he rather gives them an example of the contrary; for when he only pretends business as the reason of his leaving them, he in effect assures them, that, if he had not had such urgent business to call him away, he would have staid longer with them; and when he pretends only indisposition of body, as the reason of his refusing the cup, he does in effect grant, that if he had not been so indisposed, he would have kept pace with them in their excess; which tacit concession of his affords greater encouragement to them to continue their excess, and to others to follow the same course, than his own personal sobriety, which they have reason to believe is grounded only upon temporal and prudential considerations, does to make them sober out of a principle of conscience; and that sobriety which is not grounded upon a sense of duty, and a fear of offending God, is not the virtue of sobriety, nor properly a good work.—So that, if what the man pretends be true, and it be indeed only business, or a regard for his health that keeps him sober, his sobriety being apparently no virtue in him, cannot be an example of virtue to others. Nay, suppose the

the contrary, namely, that conscience, and a fear of offending God, be indeed the true reason of his sobriety; yet, while he gives out only those other reasons, tho' his work be manifest, the whole goodness of it is concealed; and so all that others can learn from his example, is only to mind their business, or to take care of their health, and not the virtue of sobriety; for that he purposely conceals and hides from them, and seems unwilling that they should discover it.

FROM all which it appears, that those good works only are exemplary, the causes whereof are as visible as the actions themselves; when it is not more manifest, that we do the thing that is good, than 'tis, that we do it out of a religious principle, and consequently, if we in earnest design *to edify or please our neighbour to his good*, it is requisite, not only that our work be materially good, and that it be done in the sight and presence of others, that they may take example by it; but also, that we openly and boldly acknowledge and declare to the whole world, that we do it out of conscience towards God, and not out of any worldly consideration, following herein the example of the patriarch *Joseph*, who being earnestly solicited by his mistress to lie with her, thought it not enough barely to resist the temptation, or to give out, as the reason of his not consenting, which yet he might have done, and a good reason enough it would have been, if there had been no other, the danger that there was of his master's discovering their dishonesty, and the great mischief that might thence accrue to both of them;—but laid the stress of the business where it ought to be laid, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*

To conclude, bad as the world is, men cannot, tho' they act ill themselves, help approving and commending

commending, nay, being inwardly pleased and delighted with any instances of conspicuous virtue.— This, therefore, is truly *to please men for their good to edification*, when we take care to represent religion in the fairest and most amiable light, and when we practise those virtues which naturally tend to the glory of God, and the benefit of our fellow-creatures.

WHICH that we may all do, God of his infinite mercy grant, thro' the merits and mediation of his son Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion and power, now and for ever. *Amen.*



SUNDAY



SUNDAY VI.

Of the Salvation purchased by Jesus Christ.

ACTS XVI, 29, 30, 31.

Then he (the keeper of the prison) called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas ; And brought them out, and said,—Sirs, what must I do to be saved ? And they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.



SIRS, What must I do to be saved ? was a serious and necessary question moved to *Paul* and *Silas* by their jaylor ; and what induced him thus to become a disciple to his prisoners, and to beg instruction of them in this weighty concern, you may learn from the context.

THERE was, at *Philippi*, a maid, possessed with a spirit of divination ; whose answers to such as on occasion consulted her, were a great revenue to her masters, 'till at last, *Paul*, casting out the unclean spirit,

spirit, quite spoiled that trade, which hitherto had been so gainful to them.—The masters of the maid, enraged at their loss, in revenge, laid violent hands on *Paul* and *Silas*, and drew them before the magistrates of the city; who, to gratify their accusers, caused them to be beaten and imprisoned.

BEHOLD how the wrath of man, over-ruled by a wise and almighty providence, worketh the righteousness of God!—The ruler's cruelty to the Apostles is made subservient to God's blessed purpose of mercy to the jaylor, and they, whom the magistrates committed to his custody as prisoners, were by *Christ* commissioned as ambassadors of peace, to bring salvation to his house.

HAVING received them into custody, he secured them in the dungeon; but out of that dark and dismal place the voice of their prayers and praises ascended up to heaven, which testified its high resentment of the indignity and injustice done them; for by a sudden earthquake the foundations of the prison were shaken, the doors opened, and every ones fetters loosed.

AT this amazing accident, the jaylor awakes, and soon feels, as well as his prisoners, the mighty influences of the same divine power, that opened the prison-doors; his obdurate heart relented, and was open to receive the Gospel, and being convinced that God looked upon those prisoners as his favourite servants, he fell prostrate before them, and begged pardon for that inhuman severity wherewith he had before treated them; and bringing them out of their dungeon, he humbly set himself down for instruction at those feet, which he had lately made fast in the stocks; and becoming thus miraculously, as it were, a sincere proselyte, he proposed to them the great, the important

question in our text; namely, *What shall I do to be saved?* To which they returned him the following comfortable answer; *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

THIS affecting question, and this salutary answer returned immediately to it by the two prisoners, who were disciples of our blessed Lord (especially if we consider that great salvation which is there meant) will carry with them such irresistible obligations, such strong motives to induce all of us, as it did the jailor in the text, to turn from our wicked ways, and lead holy and religious lives (which is the only available belief in *Jesus Christ*) that where it is considered with due attention, it can hardly fail, I conceive, of producing that great and good effect.

THE greatness of that salvation therefore, which we may procure by believing, that is, in other terms, by obeying the commandments of our Lord and Saviour *Jesus Christ*, is a point which I shall beg leave to insist upon, and apply with all the plainness and earnestness I can, in order that it may have a proper influence on our future deportment.

THE salvation which Christ purchased, and the Gospel, tenders to the whole race of mankind, is a comprehension of the richest Blessings that God can bestow, and a deliverance from the greatest Evils the human species can possibly sustain. It contains in it, not only all that make the nature of man absolutely perfect, or the state and condition of his life compleatly happy, but free him from every accident that is capable of rendering his condition any ways uneasy. Words cannot express the Blessings that attend it; in short, they are boundless, and beyond all imagination.

FOR,

FOR, in the first place, to be *saved* in such a manner as Christ came to save the whole world, is to have our manifold sins forgiven;—our numberless iniquities and transgressions blotted out; all that cumbrous load of guilt which oppressed our souls, and might even justly sink them into desperation itself, quite removed from our minds.

IT is to be so far reconciled to God, and restored to his favour and friendship; that he shall no longer be a consuming fire; no longer an angry, terrible, avenging God;—but a most indulgent, compassionate, and tender-hearted Father to us.

FURTHERMORE;—To be *saved*, as Christ came to save mankind, is to be delivered from the wrath to come; from that dreadful vengeance which shall one day overtake all impenitent sinners.

WHEN the heavens shall pass away with a crackling noise of fire, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein shall be burst up. When the Lord shall descend from heaven with a mighty shout, with ten thousands of his angels, to take vengeance in flaming fire, upon all ungodly men, for all the ungodly deeds which they have unrighteously committed.

WHEN all mankind, both small and great, the dead as well as the living, shall be summoned to appear before an awful tribunal, and give a full and impartial account of all their actions.

WHEN the greatest and most prosperous sinners that ever lived shall tremble and be confounded, and think themselves happy, if they could hide themselves in the dens of the mountains: when they shall say to the rocks, *fall upon us, and cover us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne,* and
from

from *the wrath of the lamb*, whose salvation we have despised.

FROM this dreadful day of wrath, and from all those amazing terrors that will then attend it (and which are but the due portion of all evil doers) doth Christ's salvation, and his only, set us free.

BUT even this is not the greatest blessing contained in this salvation; for to be *saved* as Christ came to save sinners is, after an holy and an heavenly, and in some measure, an happy life in this world, to be translated into a state of endless felicity in another.

NEVER to die any more;—never to suffer the uneasiness and infirmities subject to human nature any more;—never to feel pain or sickness, grief or sorrow, labour or weariness, disquiet or vexation any more,—but to live in a perfect state of peace and tranquillity, in perfect freedom and liberty; in a perfect enjoyment of ourselves, and the greatest good we can possibly be partakers of, and that in the highest degree for ever and ever.

IT is to have our bodies, that had long slept in the dust, raised up again, and re-united to our souls;—but no longer gross, earthly, corruptible bodies: but spiritual, heavenly, immortal ones; *fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body*, in the which he now sits at the right hand of God.

IT is to live in the city of the great king, the Heavenly *Jerusalem*; a country of perpetual light and bliss; where the glory of the lord shall fill the place; and where every object that presents itself shall add a new beauty, and contribute to the increase of the delight.

IT is to spend an eternity in the most elevated and agreeable employments; in surveying and contemplating

contemplating on the wonderful works of the Almighty; in admiring the wise dispensations of his providence from the first beginning of time; in humbly adoring his infinite love and condescending goodness to the sons of men; in reflecting upon that ineffable happiness, which arises from his communications to us; and in singing everlasting Hymns of praise and joy, and triumph to God, and our Lord Jesus, for all these manifold displays of his loving-kindness towards us.

It is to reside for ever in a place, where there are no objects of pity and compassion, of anger or envy, of hatred or distrust, to cast a damp on our enjoyments. Each member thereof being as happy as he himself can possibly desire; and the whole society encreasing the happiness of one another, by their mutual kindnesses and endearments.

It is to converse with the most delightful company that ever were assembled together; to be restored to the society of all our nearest and dearest relations, that long since died in the faith of Christ; and to have an intimate correspondence with all the great souls, whose illustrious virtues and achievements made them famous in their generations.

In a word, it is to dwell with Jesus Christ, and to *behold his glory*, and to spend a whole eternity in seeing and enjoying the great God, who made the heavens and the earth; *In whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

THIS is the Salvation which Christ hath purchased for us.—This is the Salvation which is freely offered to all mankind in the Gospel.—And now have we not sufficient motives to cry out with

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the taylor in the text;—*Sirs, What shall we do to be saved?*

O BLESSED Jesus! Is it not amazing, that thou shouldest be so rich in thy mercy, so abundant in thy love and kindness, as to propose the most inestimable treasures of thy grace and favour to the acceptance of the whole race of mankind, and that the greater part should be so stupid, so wilfully blind to their own interest, as to take little or no notice of thy boundless benevolence towards them?

O THE base, degenerate spirits of mankind! That they should becontented to lead the life of brutes (and it would be well if they could die like them too)—when it is in their power to live like angels and God himself!

THAT they should chuse to spend their days in vanity and emptiness, in folly and misery, in imaginary satisfactions only; and after all this, reap nothing but anguish and woe, and confusion for ever;—when they may both live happily here, (God, even in this world, requiting them for all the anxieties and fatigues they undergo for his sake)—and in the world to come, be more noble, and more glorious beings than words can express, or the mind of man possibly conceive!

IF we would but set down, and give ourselves the least time for reflection, how would it be possible for us to lead such abandoned lives, as too many of us do?—How would it be possible for us to live, as it were, without God in the world, without any sense of religion, regardless of every thing but the gratification of our brutish and sensual appetites? These arguments surely are of such weight and moment, that it is hard, one would think, for human nature to stand out against them, were they but applied to the mind with warmth and vigour.

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DID we but heartily and seriously consider what this present life is, and what that which is to come; did we but sedately weigh the infinite disproportion between a moment and eternity; and what a very trifle, even the greatest preferments, the greatest enjoyments, nay the greatest sufferings in this world, must needs be thought, in comparison with that *eternal weight of glory*, or that *everlasting shame and confusion of face*, that will be our portion for ever hereafter.

DID we but reflect on these things with that mature deliberation as we ought, we must inevitably find a strange and speedy alteration in ourselves for the better; we should soon perceive new thoughts arise in our minds, new desires, new designs, and new resolutions.

WE should soon, with the greatest fervency, cry out;—Let us be happy, O Lord, in the next world, and then let what will become of us in this. Deal with us here as thou pleasest; scourge us, afflict us, dispose of us in such a manner as may seem best to thy godly wisdom; nay, deprive us of life itself; thy will be done; let us but reign with Christ hereafter, and we have recompence sufficient.

WERE our minds once seriously affected with these things, all the great, the rich, the gaudy things of this world, which usually carry such a charm, such an infatuation in them, would look so contemptibly in our eyes, that we should stand astonished at ourselves for having so little judgment, as ever once to put the question, whether we should lose our innocence and peace of mind, and forfeit our title to the favour of the Almighty, for such worthless trifles.

O, WITH what noble thoughts and resolutions would the hopes of living for ever inspire us!

How regular would it make us in all our conversation! How diligent in the mortification of our lusts and evil habits! How strict and solemn in the exercise of our devotions! How serious and constant in the profession of our most holy religion! And, in a word, how solicitous should we be (above all things) to keep a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards our fellow-creatures.

BESIDES, certain it is, that the terms of our future happiness—(as proposed by our Saviour) include in them such duties only as are of themselves so agreeable to the make and frame of our natures, and so highly conducive to the improvement and perfection of our faculties; nay, and so absolutely requisite to our well-being in this world, that we must of necessity (if we would not be wilfully miserable) have imposed them as a law upon ourselves, though God Almighty had never enjoined them. And can it be accounted hard usage in God, to promise eternal rewards to the doing of those things, which we should have thought reasonable to be done, though no such rewards had ever been proposed?

ARE we not very hardly dealt with, think you, to have all the glories of heaven offered to us, upon such conditions as these? That we live up to the dignity of our natures;—that we will lead the lives of men, and not of brutes; and that we will endeavour, in this world, to make our beings as happy as we can, by the practice of virtue and religion?—And yet these are the terms upon which God hath offered Salvation to mankind in the Gospel.—O wonderful severity! O heavy burthen not to be supported upon our shoulders!

WHAT can we say to the perverseness and stupidity of some sensual men? The greatest pleasures
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that are to be procured on earth, are so shocking to them, that for their sakes, they dare not cast so much as a glance towards the happiness of heaven. Such self-denying wretches they are, that rather than be as happy as is possible in this world, they will venture eternal misery in the world to come.

How is it possible to lay a surer and more solid foundation for our future peace and repose, and the enjoyment of ourselves (whatever our state or condition of life may be) than to have an awful sense of God's presence with us, and his loving-kindness towards us? To love him, who is the most amiable of all objects; to rely on his most holy word, who is truth itself; to put our trust and confidence in him, whatever our necessities may be; and to rejoice continually in the expressions of his kindness and bounty to us; to procure to ourselves as many friends, and as few enemies as 'tis possible, by being true, faithful, and just in all our dealings, and by exercising meekness and humility, benevolence and forgiveness to all men; to live in a sober and moderate use of all the good things of this life; to keep our passions and appetites within such bounds as shall neither interrupt our healths, nor the peace and quiet of our minds; in a word, to govern ourselves, and all our actions, by the laws of the best and most perfect reason.

WHAT, I say, can be more natural, or more delightful? Or, what can contribute more to a comfortable and happy life in this world, than the practice of these things?—And yet these are the heavy burthens that Christ has laid upon us; these are the mighty bug-bears that fright us from endeavouring after that everlasting Salvation, which he offers to us in the Gospel.

So that upon the consideration of the whole matter, the terms upon which Christ hath promised this great Salvation must be acknowledged so highly reasonable, so extremely easy, that there will be no shadow of an excuse left for that man, no possibility of his escaping eternal destruction, that doth neglect it.

ESPECIALLY if we add to this, that it is tendered most affectionately to all ranks and degrees of men; none are excluded; no, not the most profligate and abandoned sinners.—How bad soever our lives have formerly been; how much soever our consciences are oppressed with the guilt of sin; yet if we will close with our Saviour's terms (and very easy ones you see they are) he is ready to bestow his Salvation upon us. This also is another consideration, which, as it gives us the greatest encouragement to set about this work, so it will make us appear still more blame-worthy, nay, altogether inexcusable, if we do not.

It is conscious guilt that too often makes men more guilty.—It is despair of mercy that frequently stops up the way to amendment, and hurries men on to still more violent courses;—but to have hopes, nay, to have assurances of forgiveness and mercy, must needs, one would think, have quite different effects.

FOR the great God to proclaim his general pardon to all his rebellious subjects; nay, not only so, but to entreat them, to beseech them to accept of it, promising withal, his favour and eternal life if they do;—sure this paternal indulgence, this gentle treatment is able to melt any ingenuous mind into the most hearty and sincere submissions;—sure he must be a hard-hearted creature indeed, a monster, and not a man, that is not won by so much condescending goodness, to lay aside
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his enmity against heaven, and reconcile himself to his God, or shall I say, to his most affectionate father.

O MY brethren, how ought the consideration of that strange, surprising, and unexpected mercy that is made over to sinners in the Gospel, to influence and affect us? How ought it to awaken the most stupid and insensible of mortals, and inflame them with a desire of returning to their gracious God, from whom they have so long wandered in the mazes of sin and folly?

It is not only the righteous and innocent that shall reap the benefit of the blood of Christ; it is not those only, who thro' a good education, and a virtuous disposition, have, in a great measure, *escaped the pollutions of the world*, and have all their lives long given up themselves to the service of Jesus Christ:—I say, 'tis not to those only, that the mercies of the Gospel are extended;—tho' of all others, these are doubtless the most happy people;—but the gate is open, even to the most abandoned prodigals, those that have *wasted all their father's substance in riot and excess*; even these the father is ready to embrace within his folded arms, if they will but humble themselves, and kneel down before him for forgiveness.

O HEARKEN to this, and weigh it well,—you, that have hitherto indulged yourselves in a vicious course of life, that have never regarded either God or his religion, but have pursued your unlawful pleasures without controul; that have given the full reins to your inordinate and brutish appetites, and have, with an high hand, affronted the majesty of heaven and earth, by your repeated provocations.

YET,—as bad as you are;—as loudly as your
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sins cry to heaven for vengeance, your case is not desperate, if you can repent.

DESPERATE, did I say? The gate of mercy is open to you;—the great God waits for you, and is ready to receive and embrace you.

CHRIST Jesus shed his blood for you, even for you; and begs and entreats you to come and partake of the benefits of his death and passion.

THE angels of God sincerely wish for your conversion, and there will be joy at the proclamation of it.

AND all this, we, who are the ministers of Christ's Gospel, have authority from him to publish and declare to you; and therefore *we beseech you, in the name of Christ, that you would be reconciled to his father.*

IT is not yet too late;—you may yet be everlastingly happy; if you will but sincerely turn and repent you of your sins, Christ still offers you his Salvation.—Hear the comfortable words of the Lord.—*Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well;—And then, tho' your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; tho' they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

O MY brethren!—As we have these kind invitations; as we have these reviving hopes, these comfortable assurances of God's mercy, why should any of us be obstinately wicked any longer? Why should we go on one step farther towards our undoing? Why should we not presently break the bands of our iniquities, and fly to our gracious God, who so lovingly calls us to his mercy, to his favour, to our own everlasting salvation.

BUT if, after all these astonishing overtures of grace and goodness, you still harden your hearts, and neglect his great Salvation, be yourselves judges

whether you shall deserve any favour, any pity or compassion, when you once come to stand in need of it, and when in the anguish of your souls you bitterly implore it.

O! 'Twill be a stinging consideration one day, to think of the greatness of that mercy, which you now so disingenuously reject; *to think how often God called you, but you refused; how often he stretched forth his hand, to have kept you from that destruction which you were so eagerly pursuing, but you did not regard him;—how often he would have gathered you to him, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not.*

THEN will you sadly wish, that you *had in this your day, understood the things that belong to your peace*; but it will then be too late, they will then be hid from your eyes.

LET these considerations fire us into worthy and manly thoughts! Let us no more make any vain excuses; no longer let us pretend I know not what difficulties; but let us chearfully and resolutely apply ourselves to the great, the important work of our Salvation.

WE have no reason to be afraid, or discouraged at any thing, for God Almighty is with us; God Almighty that made us, still takes care of us, and is ever ready to assist his faithful servants in all their extremities.

CHRIST JESUS, our high-priest, sits at the right hand of God, and continually makes intercession for us.

THE Holy Spirit never fails of vouchsafing his presence in the souls of all such as are well disposed, to carry them thro' all dangers, thro' all difficulties, thro' all temptations.

IN a word, we need not be under any fears of our future felicity, so long as we will but endeavour to do well; for both Father, Son, and Holy-Ghost have jointly declared, that Salvation shall infallibly be annexed to those endeavours.

To which Eternal Three be ascribed, as is most due, all might, majesty, dominion and power, now and for ever. *Amen.*



SUNDAY.



SUNDAY VII.

The Pleasantness of Religion demonstrated.

PROVERBS III. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.



OR the better understanding these words, we must turn back to the 13th verse of this chapter, where *Solomon* begins his encomium ; — *Happy is the man, saith he, that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding ; the merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold ; she is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared to her ; length of days is*
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in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour; her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

By wisdom, 'tis beyond dispute, he meant the steady practice of religion and virtue, and this will more plainly appear, if we have recourse to another text of Scripture. In *Job*, we find these words, *The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* I shall content myself with this single instance, since I am persuaded no one can possibly fix any other signification upon the words. In this light therefore I shall consider my text, and hope to prove, to the satisfaction of every one who hears me with attention, that no pleasures can be so sincere and delightful as those, which arise from a steady practice of religious and moral duties; and that the virtuous man, in reality, enjoys what the wicked man is for ever in pursuit of, but never attains, namely, solid and substantial pleasure; and therefore, to follow the paths of unrighteousness is not only folly, but downright madness.

We may venture, I believe, to assert, that many inconsiderate persons reject a religious life, and industriously shun every opportunity that offers of looking into the state and condition of their precious and immortal souls, and of being convinced of the beauty of holiness, from their reflections on the deportment of some hypocritical pretenders^(a); for they perceive, that those who make the loudest noise about religion, are, for the generality, not only men of sour dispositions and gloomy aspects, but too severe, and too formal in their outward behaviour; that they affect to talk in the language of the Scriptures; that they are partial censurers of

(a) Vide *Blackwall*, Vol. II.

others, and will not admit of a jest, or a smile, or the least gaiety in conversation, as favouring of too much levity; that they condemn, as unlawful, even the most innocent recreations, and seem to judge all that time mispent, which is not employed in praying, reading, or some such other exercise of devotion; such, I say, they perceive to be the conduct of many of those who make the loudest pretence to religion; and forming from thence a contemptible idea of it, they become greatly prejudiced and prepossessed against it; and if this be religion, it is a thing they cannot by any means approve of; for they are naturally, perhaps, of a lively disposition, and if they find that chearfulness is inconsistent with it, they had rather be without even religion itself, than have their tempers so disagreeably sowered.

BUT now all this disgust at religion is, in truth, grounded upon a false and mistaken notion of it; and religion is not, in fact, what it appeared to them in that hypocritical disguise; for a man may be strictly virtuous and pleasant notwithstanding; he may be truly religious, and yet innocently gay; he may be a truly pious man, and yet appear in dress, in aspect, and in common conversation, just as other men;—he may be, in short, a very good christian, and yet not cease to be a perfectly good companion; for true religion does not consist in a prim garb, an affected phrase, a formal deportment, a down-cast look; in sighing, sobbing and whining, or in any fooleries of the like nature; but in the rational and manly worship of the true God, and in a sincere regard for, and an universal benevolence towards our fellow-creatures.

IT must be confessed, that the tenour of too many discourses delivered from the pulpit may have contributed, in some measure, towards the establishment

blishment of these mistaken notions of the unpleasantness of religion. For the Clergy themselves are too apt to assure their auditors, that were they to suffer all the inconveniencies that can possibly attend this life; yet their gain would be immensely great, if they might but at last attain that crown of glory, which is reserved for the righteous. And tho' this is undoubtedly a most evident truth; yet this manner of proposing it, seems to imply a kind of necessity of suffering, or at least, that, as to this world, a religious life is not near so agreeable as the indulgence of our passions without controul; but that such an inference is absolutely false, shall be my present business to prove, and I hope I shall make it appear to a demonstration, that the *ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace.*

AND here, if the time allotted would permit, I might demonstrate, that there are no vices whatever, but what are attended with numberless inconveniencies; and that the man who despairs of leading a pleasant life, would do well to consider and weigh, which will contribute most towards it, virtue or vice. I shall not take up your time so unnecessarily, as to enter into any arguments on either side; it will be sufficient, I conceive, only to put the question, whether the swearer, the liar, the backbiter, the blasphemer, the adulterer, the drunkard, and the like, can possibly, even setting aside all considerations of futurity, enjoy so much real satisfaction as the man of probity; good nature, justice, temperance and humanity; even upon the supposition we should add, that he had an awful regard for the Supreme Being, and was moreover a constant and serious attendant 'at his holy temple. Upon the supposition, I say, that he be a religious, as well as a moral man, let but
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cool and unprejudiced reason be the judge, and I am fully persuaded the balance of pleasure, even in this world, will turn immensely on the side of the religious man.

IF these things are so, (as most assuredly they are) I should conceive, we need not say more to prevail on every true lover of pleasure to embrace the cause of virtue and religion;—but lest it should be objected, that these things may have a specious appearance, when held forth in general terms, we will descend to particulars; and tho' it will be impossible to enumerate half the delights which the practice of virtue and religion will afford; let us, however, see with what beauty some of them will appear upon examination; and I will venture to assert, that I shall leave at present untold many particulars that might be urged in its favour; and moreover, tho' my manner of treating this important subject, may be so unequal to its merit, that it may lose much of its lustre; yet I trust, there are such inherent beauties in virtue and goodness, that they will shine out conspicuous, be the representation of them ever so disadvantageous or imperfect.

To begin then, with our duty towards God.—What an exalted satisfaction must it be, to reflect on the excellency of him who made all things;—to view the glory of the heavens;—to consider how wisely all things are framed for the delight and conveniency of the whole creation? Such a contemplation as this must surely melt our souls with joy and gratitude; especially, if we reflect how considerable a share was made for our service only; if we consider, that Almighty God has not only created, but subdued likewise all things to us; if we behold how extensive our dominion is, we must be filled with wonder and amaze-

ment.—But what shall we say, when we view this powerful Being, this all-glorious God, permitting the work of his own hands to regard him as a friend, a benefactor, a tender and indulgent father; one who has given such surprising instances of his love, as no earthly parent could do; one, who laid down his life for us; one, who submitted to the shame and pain of the cross, when he had it in his power to have struck his murderers dead with a single frown. But not to dwell upon what must doubtless occur to every one here present; I shall proceed to some other great, tho' not altogether so obvious advantages, in order to our reverential awe, and filial fear of the Almighty.—Among the many that might be produced, I think most people are too insensible of the great honour, the inexpressible joys that attend the duty of prayer.—Can there possibly be a more exalted pleasure, than to reflect, that we are permitted to converse with an almighty and ever glorious being, to whom we owe our existence; that we can not only converse with him, but likewise unload our griefs, pour out our very souls before him, who, we are well assured, is most able to relieve us; who, we are certain, will extricate us out of all our difficulties, provided it will be for our real interest and advantage? That we may have a more lively sense of the important advantages of prayer; let us consider, our Blessed Saviour has assured us, that whatever proper request we shall ask in his name, shall be granted to us; so that to this alone we may ascribe all the comforts and conveniencies that the Almighty is continually showering down upon us; besides, to despise so glorious an advantage as that of prayer, is the height of ingratitude; for when we reflect, that to the bounty of God alone we owe all our enjoyments,

enjoyments, how ought our souls to overflow with thankfulness!—Let us suppose an earthly prince inviting any of his subjects to a frequent and familiar converse with him, courting, nay intreating them to make known their necessities to him, promising to grant whatever they shall ask, that will conduce to their real good; declaring, that he will always lend an attentive ear to their complaints, will succour them from the malice of their enemies; and as a further encouragement, after a little time spent in attending thus upon him, will raise them to some important post, will distinguish them from the rest of his subjects, by some remarkable badge of honour; would you not think that man very remiss, remarkably stupid, who should let slip so favourable an opportunity of advancing his fortune?—I am persuaded there are few, very few, who would refuse so advantageous an offer; but on the contrary, receive it with all the testimonies of an unfeigned joy, would be ready at all times to extol the bounty of so indulgent a master, would esteem it as the highest affront imaginable for any one to cast the least reflection on his prince in his company; and would think it his duty to vindicate his honour upon all occasions. What then can be the reason why we should so eagerly catch at the least smile of an earthly prince, and reject with scorn the proffered friendship of the king of heaven? The power of the one bears no comparison with the other; the greatest earthly monarch is but his vice-gerent, can do nothing without his permission, cannot bestow the least favour on any of his vassals, but with his consent and approbation; whereas all things are easy to the Almighty Ruler of the universe; he can exalt the humble and meek, raise him from the depth of misery to the height of

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glory;

glory ; nay, to what we are all so fond of, human glory. Surely then, in common prudence, we ought to try what prayer will do, if it be only to procure temporal blessings, and success to our worldly undertakings. And what would induce me more eagerly to persuade the worldly man, to try this means of procuring himself success is, that by a constant and habitual practice of this duty, he would by degrees become sensible of the honour, be fond of opening his whole heart before the Almighty ; and by frequent asking, his ever merciful benefactor will undoubtedly pour the dew of his heavenly benediction upon him ; and surely, he that fears the Lord, and feels the effects of his prayers, is the truly happy man ;—since no worldly calamity can touch him ; he is absolutely out of the reach of fortune ; he has a friend to apply to, who is not only ever willing, but has it always in his power to calm the sorrows of this inconstant world.

BEFORE we conclude this article, give us leave to make a little comparison between the person who lives in the constant contempt of this duty, and the man who makes it his common practice.

IF we consider, that there is a Supreme Being, who superintends all our actions, who has an unlimited power over us, who can baffle the designs of our enemies, who can confer on us, if he pleases, every earthly blessing, and sometimes does, by the most unlikely means ; we shall easily see whether he that is constant in prayer, or he that lives in the neglect of it, is the wisest, the happiest man, even in this world. Supposing we should allow the wise man and his opposite to be equally liable to misfortunes, which is not altogether a fair concession, considering that luxury, debauchery, and the other attendants on folly and impiety,

impiety, weaken a man's strength, waste his substance, and naturally expose him to misfortunes; but supposing them, I say, equally liable to trouble; the one has nothing to comfort him; his own mind is a perpetual fund of uneasy thoughts; tormenting reflections, and dreadful apprehensions; he has no one to fly to for succour; therefore must inevitably sink under the weight of his afflictions.—But it is far otherwise with the wise man, who has accepted the gracious invitations of his Redeemer.—Tho' misfortunes should attend him, he has a tender father, a gracious, indulgent, and all-powerful God to fly to for relief; he prays to him for comfort; and tho', the Almighty, for reasons best known to himself, may continue the outward affliction; yet he always sends him such a measure of grace and consolation, as enables him to undergo the seemingly hard dispensations of providence with resignation, and submission to the divine will. He is firmly persuaded, that nothing can befall him, but by the permission of his God, and therefore submits.—He first takes all the prudent care he can of himself, and then trusts to the providence of God for his safety and protection (a).—"What can that man fear, who
" takes care in all his actions to please a Being
" that can avert any misfortune from befalling
" him, or turn any such misfortune to his advantage? The person who lives with this constant
" and habitual regard to the great Superintendant
" of the world, is indeed sure that no real evil
" can come into his lot. Blessings may appear
" under the shape of pains, losses, and disappointments, but let him have patience, and he will
" see them in their proper figures. Dangers may

(a) *Vide Spectator.*

“ threaten him, but he may rest satisfied, that
 “ they will either not reach him at all, or that if
 “ they do, they will be the instruments of good
 “ to him. In short, he may look upon all crosses
 “ and accidents, sufferings and afflictions, as
 “ means which are made use of to bring him to
 “ happiness. This is even the worst of that man’s
 “ condition, who makes a friend of the Almighty,
 “ and applies to him as his only help in time of
 “ need. It doubtless very often happens, that
 “ those things which appear evils in our own
 “ eyes, appear also as such to him, who has hu-
 “ man nature under his care ; and then they are cer-
 “ tainly averted from the person, who has made
 “ himself, by his virtue, an object of divine fa-
 “ vour. Almost every one can tell you instances
 “ of this nature, where men of virtue have had
 “ extraordinary escapes out of such dangers, as
 “ have enclosed them, and which have seemed
 “ inevitable”.

I THINK I may fairly leave this particular, and
 appeal to every man’s judgment, whether an im-
 plicit reliance on an all-powerful Being, be not the
 truest wisdom, and an open confession of our dis-
 tress to the God of all consolation, the highest
 pleasure and most exalted satisfaction that a ratio-
 nal being can possibly enjoy.

I SHALL now proceed to shew the pleasure of
 putting in practice some other christian virtues ;
 but shall dwell chiefly on humanity or benevo-
 lence towards our fellow-creatures, which I am per-
 suaded must be thought the most extensive, as well
 as the greatest of all christian perfections. I shall
 not, however, pretend either to set bounds to, or
 give a particular detail of the various arguments
 that may be brought to induce every man to the
 practice of it, my present business being only to

shew, that there are real pleasures to be found in the practice, but none in the neglect, of this necessary duty. And surely every one will be sensible of this whose heart is not hardened to all the touches of humanity; for I leave you yourselves to judge how great a pleasure it must be to him, who has a true taste of life, to ease the aching heart; to hear the distressed blessing his liberal hand, to wipe the tears from the widow's and the orphan's eye; I say, the joy, the praises, the blessings, which must accompany such a benevolent disposition, is equal, nay, 'tis superior, far superior to any pleasure this world can afford. I leave it to the determination of every cool and unprejudiced person, whether he can resist the joy that arises in his mind from the bare recital of a truly generous action; whether he is not sensibly affected when he only hears that some worthy family is snatched from some exquisite distress, by the ready assistance of some truly compassionate man; what heart is so hard, that will not, on occasions such as these, feel the joy thrilling thro' his very soul?—Say, ye voluptuous, if there be any sensuality equal to this.—Can even laughter itself give such delight, as those tears, which, at such times involuntarily flow?—And if a bare recital can give such exquisite pleasure, judge then what real satisfaction must arise in that man's mind, who is capable of being this great, this good, this generous benefactor.

You are all, I doubt not, well acquainted with the story of the good Samaritan in the Gospel. Let me ask you!—Must not those who inhumanly passed by the poor, distressed, wounded, wretch, reflect with some compunction on their baseness? Put the case home to yourselves. Suppose you heard some unfortunate wretch, like this, beseech-

ing you, in a piteous, hollow tone, to lend him a helping hand ; suppose you passed by him, saw his wounds bleed, heard him imploring you, in the name of heaven, to take compassion on him ; suppose you saw his anguish, the tears trickling down his furrowed cheeks, and yet unmoved with the piteous sight you had passed by, and left him to die, for ought you knew to the contrary, in the utmost misery ; sure I am, every one of you would acknowledge, that the cruelty of such a neglect would be a perpetual torment to you to your dying day. But then suppose yourself to be the good Samaritan ; suppose you behold this miserable object naked, wounded, just ready to expire, his hopes, from the inhumanity of those who had just left him, almost lost, and you have bowels of compassion for him ;—but upon a nearer view, suppose, you find him your most inveterate enemy, would it not be a noble exercise of your benevolence, to lay aside your resentments, to consider him, not as an adversary, but as a man, wretched, miserable and distressed ; and being a man yourself, liable to the like misfortunes, to take pity on him, bind up his wounds, lay him on your own beast, and convey him to a place of rest and safety ?—After such an action, would you not go home highly satisfied with yourself ? Would it not affect you with the most pleasing emotions to hear him, who was lately your professed enemy, suing for pardon, calling earnestly to God to shower his blessings on your head, and earnestly courting your future favour and friendship ?

I ONLY bring this as an instance ; for undoubtedly few persons have it in their power to act in such an exalted manner.—But surely every one can visit his sick neighbour, pray by, and comfort him, and give the needy some small relief ; 'tis in every
every

every one's power to be generous one way or other, and I am sure the smallest trifle expended to demonstrate our humanity and benevolence, provided it be not done out of ostentation, is richly bestowed; and as the satisfaction every such action brings to the doer of it is too evident to be further insisted upon, I shall conclude, that *these are the ways of pleasantness, — these are the paths of peace.*



G 4

SUNDAY



SUNDAY VIII.

A Representation of the Miseries of
human Life.

JOB XIV. 1.

*Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days,
and full of trouble.*



MOST men are apt to entertain too high an opinion of this life, tho' every one's experience loudly dictates to him, that misery and sorrow attend the whole race of mankind. 'Tis with difficulty and reluctance that we are convinced of what we should wish might not be true; and we flatter ourselves, for that reason, that some time or other we shall be perfectly happy here. We imagine, that if this or that particular obstacle was but once removed, our present state and condition would

would then be sufficiently happy; but alas! we forget that if those evils, with which we are actually encumbered, were removed, we should still be liable to others, that we know not of, and that even the possession of what we so fondly wish for, might not only be attended with some unforeseen inconveniencies, but create in us some more violent desires, and plunge us into deeper troubles.

It may be objected, indeed, that since human nature is daily exposed to so many calamities, and utterly incapable of perfect happiness in this world; that forasmuch as the greatest enjoyments which we possess, arise from the pleasing hopes and expectations of some earthly happiness yet to come; such hopes are absolutely necessary to support and carry us thro' this vale of tears with some tolerable degree of comfort; 'tis therefore an ungrateful task, to awaken any one out of such an alluring dream; to set the calamities of this life full in his view, and endeavour to persuade him, that all the sanguine hopes he had conceived of happiness, were ill-grounded, and that all the joys he may expect here are only airy visions, that will vanish in the moment he attempts to embrace them.

I SHOULD very readily allow this to be a substantial objection to all discourses of this nature, had we no joys to hope for but those in this life; but since our indulgent creator has given us assurances of eternal happiness; of joys unspeakable, and full of glory in a future state; of a rest hereafter, which nothing can disturb; since he has graciously pointed out the way for our attainment of this happiness, and that in so plain a manner, that nothing but wilful blindness can possibly make us mistake it; and since, in a word, an over-fond pursuit after earthly enjoyments too often proves a very great impediment in our search after another and a better

better state; it must, doubtless, be highly necessary, as well as useful, for men sometimes to be reminded, that true happiness is no where to be found but in heaven; and that whilst they are searching to find it here, they are running into a fatal mistake, which will inevitably plunge them into misery and destruction. I shall therefore take occasion, from these considerations, to dwell a little on this subject, and demonstrate to you, that holy *Job's* assertion in my text, proceeded from long experience, and a thorough insight into human nature.

IN order, therefore, to wean us from a too inordinate love of this life, let us consider, that they, who live the greatest number of years, have but a short life on earth. *Man, that is born of a woman, is but of few days,*—a little time passes away in the ease and innocence of infancy and childhood. A little more, and the bloom of youth is lost and gone; a little more weakens the strength of riper manhood; and if we live still longer than this, yet a little time lays the infirmities and decays of old age at last in the silent grave.—Let us but compare the duration and continuance of some inanimate things with the life of man, and we shall, doubtless, entertain a more just and adequate idea of its contemptible shortness. How often do the works of our own hands subsist, whilst we ourselves are crumbled into dust and ashes? We contrive them for our ease and comfort, and in a little time leave them behind us to we know not whom.—We live in houses, we meet in churches, that were built by persons, whose very names are now perhaps wholly forgotten; we read books, written by men, who were once as lively and active as ourselves, tho' at present they are dead, and have lain low in their silent graves
for

for some hundreds of years.—How many generations have lived upon the earth, which are now dead and gone, and yet the earth remains! For a while they had a portion here, and then resigned it to others, and they after a while have resigned it in their turn again.—How many lives has the course of this one sun measured, and yet continues to run his race! Some thousands of years has that most radiant and glorious luminary been a burning light;—when alas! we are but as creatures of yesterday; and how much longer after us the earth and the sun may last, 'tis not in the power of human wisdom to determine. But if we consider the infinite duration of the ever-glorious JEHOVAH, who is from everlasting to everlasting, who always was, is, and ever shall be,—O! how justly may we despise the shortness of our present existence!—The longest life of man is much more inconsiderable to the Almighty, than one day past is to us, nay less than a watch in the night, or a few hours lost in sleep; in short, time itself, in its utmost extent, is as nothing, when compared with eternity.

MOREOVER, this life, short as it is, is daily exposed to sorrow and trouble. And this will most evidently appear, when we reflect on the weak and fluctuating nature of every thing here below. To instance first, in the frailty of our mortal bodies.—I may venture to affirm, that the diseases incident to the human body are innumerable. Should all that have been felt on this occasion be recounted, yet we could not be assured that there would be no additional misfortunes. Every part of us harbours the seeds of mortality. We are very easily disordered, and very often so.—An infected air, too intense an heat, or too violent a cold, soon influences and affects our weak constitutions.—A sudden

den disappointment, nay, an unexpected turn of good fortune can throw us into a disorder.—Labour and care may waste, sloth and luxury may enervate and impair our strength.—If we are not exposed to the injuries and oppressions of penury and want; yet our very abundance may prove fatal to us. The most trifling accident may not only wound, but bring us to the grave. And moreover, these numberless bodily ills, from which no earthly power can protect us, are attended with very uneasy and afflicting circumstances. They often render us, not only a burthen to our friends, but to ourselves; they debar us of our liberty, torment us with pain, and deprive us of the sense and enjoyment of pleasure; they deface our beauty and take away our strength. Besides, the tedious and loathsome prescriptions of the physician are oftentimes as irksome and ungrateful as the disease itself, which we labour under.—And after all, how weak is the power of art!—How uncertain a help to us!—Death at last prevails against us, and then, if we have not laid up for ourselves a treasure in heaven, how dreadful, how amazing, how deplorable is our state and condition!

THE great inconstancy of our tempers is another source of much trouble. Now we most ardently love, and impatiently desire, what we have not, and look down with an eye of contempt and abhorrence on what we have; we are apt to think the good we enjoy is altered, when 'tis only our palled and distempered appetites that deprive us of the true relish of it; and, in short, so capricious are most men, even those who have few or no real evils, that they will find out imaginary ones to torment and perplex them.

THE wickedness of mankind is also another very fruitful cause of mischief and sorrow to others, as
well

well as to themselves.—From hence proceed injustice, rage, envy, ambition, covetousness, pride, rebellions, persecutions and the like. These occasion the orphans tears, the widows sighs, and the groans of the oppressed.—It would be endless to enumerate all the evils mankind bring upon one another:—The slanders, back-bitings, revilings, and false testimonies, with a thousand other evils that attend a wicked and malicious tongue. Man has not a greater foe than man.—From hence proceed commotions and bloody wars, battles and murders, and the numberless calamities that are unavoidable consequences of rapine and confusion.

ANOTHER cause of our misery and affliction, are the disorders of nature and the elements. Sometimes the air infects us with noisome and pestilential diseases.—The waters, at other times, overwhelm us with impetuous inundations.—In one place, the earth opens and swallows up the miserable inhabitants; in another, perhaps, subterraneous fires break out, and lay waste the affrighted country. Sometimes the winds arise, and bury us in the ruins of our habitations; sometimes again we are parched with immoderate heats; and at other times, chilled and benumbed with long and excessive colds.—Thus all things in nature, at times, seem to resent, and punish us for the affronts, which we wilfully, or at least carelessly, offer the Sovereign of the world; and those things which were originally intended for our comfort and support, are productive of sorrow, trouble, sickness, and death itself.

HAVING thus, in as brief a manner as I possibly could, demonstrated, that our lives on earth are beset with enemies, and surrounded with innumerable evils, I shall proceed to the application, and therein direct you how to make a due use and improvement

ment of them ; that so we may derive good from those very evils, and receive the happy fruits of joy and comfort, from those sorrows and miseries, with which we are so surrounded.

SINCE then we cannot but be sensible, that this life is unavoidably exposed to sorrow and affliction, that no state is free from anxieties and trouble ; that we are not sure of one moment's peace ; that our lives are, at best, but short and transitory ; that we are in the midst of many and great dangers ; and that nothing but the providence of God can protect and secure us from becoming a prey to our potent adversaries ; these considerations should fill our hearts with a just contempt of this transitory life, and prompt us to secure, as far as in us lies, the enjoyment of a better, and one more lasting. To view this life in a fair and impartial light, to look upon it as it actually is, embittered with cares and fatigues, will not only mitigate our grief for the departure of those that are near and dear to us, but reconcile us to our own deaths, when God shall think fit to call us to himself. These truths will help us to endure with patience the evils and inconveniencies which at any time afflict us.—They will teach us to say, should these evils, which I now labour under, be removed, I shall be exposed to others, which, perhaps, may be heavier, and too great for me to bear ; that portion of sorrow with which it has pleased the Almighty to afflict me, I will humbly submit to, lest, by a too restless endeavour to throw off my burthen, I should render the weight of it insupportable.

AGAIN, the calamities to which this present life is daily exposed, should persuade men to the steady practice of religion and virtue ; for to keep a conscience void of offence towards God, is our best
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and surest consolation in the day of distress. 'Tis, doubtless, a very aggravating circumstance for a man to reflect, that he owes his calamities to himself; that they are the result of his own rashness and folly; the effects of his own inordinate passions, his darling vices, or unruly appetites and ungovernable desires; that notwithstanding he lives in the most deplorable state, yet he can expect no relief from death itself; but on the contrary, that he must exchange the miseries of this life for the torments of hell; that he shall be consigned to that infernal abyss, where the worm never dies, and where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth for evermore.—The good man, however, has no room for such agonizing fears, such dreadful apprehensions as these; tho' troubles and sorrows may attend him here; yet they are made lighter from the consideration, that death will soon put an end to all his misfortunes, and convey him to those mansions of bliss, which are prepared for the righteous, where he will drink of those rivers of pleasure, which flow at God's right hand for ever and ever.

How will that man triumph over the dangers and afflictions of this world, who puts his whole trust and confidence in God! who firmly believes, that an omnipotent and omniscient Being is his guardian and protector! and that he is not absolutely naked, and altogether exposed to the many evils that surround him! that no misfortune can ever befall him, but by the permission of his God, his faithful friend, his indulgent father, and all-bounteous benefactor! A wise man will always reflect, that what evils soever shall attend him, they will in the end turn either to his spiritual or temporal advantage; and, indeed, we find, by experience, that the greatest comfort of a man's life has been
often

often brought about by means the most improbable, nay, the most seemingly opposite that could possibly be devised;—that misfortunes have sometimes given a man a glorious opportunity of conquering and subduing some unruly passion, or inordinate affection, which he could not before get the mastery of; and has brought to light some shining virtues that would have lain latent, and for ever concealed in the sun-shine of prosperity.

To conclude, to take heed to our ways, and secure to ourselves a life of happiness hereafter, is the best use we can possibly make of the several considerations which we have already produced; and though this life be short and transitory, dashed with gall, and mingled with sorrows and misfortunes; yet if we do not delude ourselves by unnecessary delays, and if we will but diligently apply ourselves to the great work of our Salvation, we need not despair of eternal happiness. And how great a gain, what benefits and advantage it will be to employ our lives in the unwearied practice of religion and virtue, will appear from hence; that such a deportment will greatly abate the anguish of our misfortunes here, and will most assuredly entitle us to a crown of glory hereafter.—To employ this transitory life in the attainment of eternal bliss, is greater wisdom than for a man to lay out pebbles for diamonds, exchange dust for gold, and sparkling trifles for great and glorious stars. 'Tis, in short, to lay out earth for heaven; to labour for a few days, in order to secure an eternal rest.—This is truly and greatly to redeem time;—this advice, if followed to purpose, will turn all our sorrow into joy; when the darkness of this transitory life shall be dispersed, a glorious morn shall break out in comfort unspeakable upon us; and the meridian sun of
righteousness

righteousness shall warm us into new life.—Then we shall see him who was dead, and is alive again, even the Lord of Glory :

To whom, therefore, Father, Son, and Holy-Ghost, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. *Amen.*



H

SUNDAY.



SUNDAY IX.

Considerations on a future Judgment.

REVELAT. XXII. 12.

And behold, I come quickly,—and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be.



Notwithstanding this, and many other expressions of the same importance in the sacred Scriptures, wherein God hath peremptorily declared, that he will judge the world at the last day, and *give to every man according as his works shall be*; and notwithstanding it is an article of faith in itself, highly rational, from the consideration of God's infinite justice and over-ruling providence, and the natural result of good and evil actions; yet the generality of mankind are as indolent and
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remiss in their duty, as if there was no such reward intended, no such judgment ever to be made; or, in case there should be, yet the time for the accomplishment thereof, was so far distant, that both seemed altogether unworthy of the least care or concern.

I SHALL not, however, make it my present business to demonstrate the certainty of a future state; of which, I presume, you are all fully convinced already;—but shall enquire into such particulars only as are most interesting, and most proper for our serious consideration.

IN the first place, therefore, I shall enquire into the true reasons, why a concern of such great importance as a judgment to come is, should make so little impression on the minds of the generality of mankind, notwithstanding they acknowledge that they believe it.

AND in the second place; I shall shew you, by what means the consideration of a future judgment may have a stronger influence, and a more awful effect upon us all.

AND first then, I am to enquire into the true reasons, why a concern of such great importance as a judgment to come is; should make so little impression on the minds of the generality of mankind, notwithstanding they acknowledge that they believe it; especially when they are so tender and sensible of every trivial circumstance, with respect to all their temporal enjoyments; and the principal reasons that can be alledged, in order to palliate, at least, if not justify such unwarrantable indifference, in regard to the affairs of another life, are these that follow;

- I. THAT there are very few; who have patience to reflect on things that are at a great distance,

stance, however weighty and important, in reality, they may possibly be.

II. A GENERAL presumption on God's mercy towards mankind, on account of the frailty of their natures, notwithstanding the severity of his repeated menaces in the sacred Scriptures.

I. It is mens restless temper, and their want of due reflection only, which makes them shew so little regard for another life; for, if they would but lay both worlds in the balance, and weigh one against the other, they would soon perceive the manifest folly of preferring those enjoyments, which this world account happiness, before those which are offered to their choice in another;—for let us make all the fair allowances that may be, as to our inclinations and circumstances in this world; as to the distance, and the imperfect ideas we have of the joys of another; yet upon mature deliberation, every man will be sure to chuse that felicity which is to come, for the following reasons.

FIRST then, supposing the happiness of both to be equal, yet there is no proportion between the duration of the one and the other; and he, who will give himself the least time for reflection, will be sure to chuse an infinite and endless happiness, before one that must be, in a short time, irrecoverably lost, and may, for ought we know to the contrary, be lost in a moment.

IN the next place, the more we consider, the more we repent of placing too much of our felicity in temporal enjoyments; because reason and experience demonstrate the folly of it; but the more a good man considers, the better satisfied his mind is, in fixing its delight in those that are spiritual,

spiritual, on things above, where only that good is to be found, which can make him truly happy.

AND in the last place, he that keeps his eye fixed on a distant and future happiness, does not by that means lose any of the real enjoyments of human life; but he that places his whole happiness on any sublunary enjoyments, is sure to be disappointed in this world, and what is infinitely worse, for ever to miscarry in another;—and this makes as wide a difference as can possibly be conceived in the choice.—Should God, indeed, make it absolutely necessary for us, in order to our attainment of future happiness, to forego all the pleasures of this life, the terms would be seemingly severe;—nay, and too hard, perhaps, for us to comply with.—For, if all the gratifications of our sensual appetites must be renounced, we must never contemplate on the pleasing varieties of nature; never lend an ear to the sweet melody of musick; never indulge our palates, but when hunger calls, or our throats are parched with immoderate thirst.—God, however, hath not dealt thus severely with mankind.—He allows us to refresh our natures with moderation, and hath only given a check to the violence of our appetites, the gratification whereof would in reality prove detrimental to us; and upon our forbearance of what is unreasonable, as well as unnecessary, together with our entire dependance upon his good providence for our daily subsistence,—he hath made us the gracious offer of eternal happiness. In short, he requires no more of us than to refrain from those excesses which are condemned both by nature and reason.—And those, who will but seriously consider, cannot but see how unreasonable it is to place their happiness in forbidden pleasures, and to imagine, that nothing can make them happy, but what God hath

declared shall make them miserable. It must be a most unaccountable perverseness in our desires, if nothing can gratify them but what God abhors.— It were no difficult task to shew, that God debars us of nothing, but what is really repugnant to our well-being here; and how then can any such thing as happiness be hoped for in the enjoyment of those things which he peremptorily prohibits?— And when a man runs the risk of being miserable for ever, for what can never make him happy even here, tho' his passions met with no manner of check or controul, he shews how far he is from acting like a prudent, rational, and considerate creature. A want of due reflection, therefore, is one great reason why the thoughts of a judgment to come make so little impression upon the minds of men.

II. THE other reason is, an unwarrantable presumption on God's infinite mercy and goodness.— The first thing which sinners, in the heat of their youth, and the eager pursuit of their lawless passions, aim at, is to think as little as possible on what they are doing, or what will be the consequence of their actions.—For every thought, even in regard to themselves, is uneasy to them,—and with respect to God, much more so;—they endeavour, therefore, to drive away all such melancholy ideas by some artifice or other;—namely, by gaming, by company, or such other gay amusements, as rather aggravate and inflame their vices, than any ways correct or subdue them.

If these means prove ineffectual, and there will still be some gloomy hours, wherein conscience begins to rouse itself, and to awaken the sinner to some sense of his folly;—then is he ready to hearken with pleasure to any sarcastical invectives against every religious and moral duty;—then
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does he applaud the wit of any one who dares to utter a bold and smart thing against the wisdom of all ages.—And one or two such reflections, without any kind of proof, are cried up as infinitely preferable to the most solid rules of morality, or the incontestible evidence of natural and revealed religion.—Any sceptical argument, how weak soever, passes with them for full conviction, and the most groundless and unreasonable cavils against religion are embraced, for no other just reason, but because 'tis the thing to which they have an utter aversion;—and even an idle jest, to depreciate the notion of a day of judgment, shall carry more weight with them, than the strongest arguments in the world to evince it.—The true reason is, they are bigotted to their darling vices, and they would fain indulge themselves in them without the least restraint;—whereas the thoughts of a judgment to come give the strongest checks imaginable to the violence of their inclinations.

BUT suppose, after all the terrible and repeated expressions that occur in the sacred Scriptures concerning the day of judgment, joined to the reasonableness of the thing, should make such strong impressions on their minds, that they cannot, spite of themselves, entirely shake off the fears and apprehensions of it;—then their last refuge is to lessen and extenuate those fears, from a general presumption of God's infinite mercy and goodness; and therefore they are willing to suppose, that notwithstanding God, to keep the world in awe, hath threatened them loudly with the dreadful severities of the great day; yet, as a tender and indulgent parent, who threatens to disinherit his disobedient and rebellious son, and expose him to the merciless world, in order to reclaim him,—when it comes to the test, may possibly

relent, not from any merit in his son, but his own bowels of pity and compassion:—So they hope and believe,—or at least are inclined so to do,—that God at the great day will not proceed in that rigorous manner which he hath threatened. And to buoy themselves up in these hopes, they muster up all the most plausible pleas they can possibly think of for the extenuation of their vicious courses. Had we indeed been created, say they, purely intellectual beings, free from this load of flesh, and those strong propensities which are natural to it, then it had been more reasonable to have called us to a strict account for every action of our lives; for then every evil inclination must have proceeded from our minds; but now our frail bodies corrupt and draw them aside; and that natural bias over-powers our reason.—And when those inordinate desires are strongest, men have not that judgment which is necessary to check and controul them.—So that the very frame and frailty of human nature, seem to plead for sins committed in the heat of youth.—Besides,—such is the strictness and purity of the law of God, such and so great is the weakness and disability, the ignorance and inadvertency of mankind, that, if God will make no allowance for casual errors, who can stand before his awful tribunal?—And if any allowance will be made for sins of infirmity, then there are so many abatements to be made for sins committed thro' sudden passion, through mistake, through the unavoidable impotency of human nature, and thro' constitution, that the severity of that day is not (after all) much to be dreaded.

THIS is, in short, all that the sinner can possibly urge against the severity of the day of judgment; but to shew how weak and how groundless

less such an excuse or plea is, we shall offer to your consideration the following reflections.

I. GOD will certainly *judge the world in righteousness*; for which reason no one shall have the least just cause to complain of the harshness or severity of his proceedings.

II. NONE shall suffer at that day, but such as are wilful, impenitent, and obdurate sinners.—For, it is not only agreeable to the mercy and goodness of the Almighty, to forgive such sinners as sincerely repent; but it is one of the principal intentions of the Gospel, to assure mankind of such forgiveness, by the highest testimonies, even by the death and resurrection of his dearly beloved Son, and all the miracles wrought in confirmation of it, and of the truth of his doctrine.

III. THERE are divers degrees of obstinacy and perverseness, and the judgments that shall be passed upon mankind, shall in some measure be proportioned thereto.—Some mens capacities and opportunities have very much exceeded others; some have broken through stronger convictions and more powerful assistances of divine grace than others; some have had more early instructions, more repeated warnings, more favour and indulgence from heaven than others.—And as it is highly reasonable, that persons should suffer for their obstinacy and perverseness; so is it equally reasonable, that they should suffer only in proportion to the degrees and circumstances of it.

IV. It is no severity at all, no act of injustice in God, to deprive men of that happiness which they have wilfully rejected; and to doom them to that misery which their repeated crimes have so justly deserved.—Hath not God made the most condescending offers of mercy and salvation, that
his

his creatures could possibly expect from him, after so many, and such high provocations?—Could heaven stoop lower than it hath done to vile and ungrateful sinners?—When the Son of God came down from heaven, on purpose to be a mediator between his father and them;—when the holy Spirit has warned and exhorted them to the consideration of their eternal welfare;—when the messengers of this reconciliation are instructed to woo and intreat sinners in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God;—when the patience and long-suffering of God is exercised so much on purpose to lead them to repentance;—when God, instead of perfect obedience, is willing to pardon and pass by all their offences, if they will but be truly sorry for them; and to receive them still into his favour and mercy;—when after all this, I say, men rather prefer the present pleasures of sin, before all that happiness which God so freely offers, is it any injustice in him to suffer them to be deprived of those blessings which they so wilfully, so ungratefully, so obstinately refused?—And if we suppose, that the souls of men subsist in another world, entirely free from all those clouds of error and mistake, by which they are deluded and drawn aside in this; it is not to be imagined, but that they must for ever suffer an intolerable anguish within, in the language of the Scriptures, called, *a worm that never dies, and a fire that is never quenched*,—from the incessant reflections on their own folly.—What vengeance beyond this, God may inflict, we know not;—may none of us ever know it!—But, sure we are, it will never exceed the proportion and desert of their sins.—And this, doubtless, is sufficient to clear the justice of God in his proceedings with mankind in the day of judgment.

It remains now,—only to shew by what means God's bringing us to judgment may make a deeper impression upon our minds;—and here we may enlarge a little on the two following articles.

FIRST, That our neglect, or want of reflection upon it, instead of making our condition better, will make it worse.

SECONDLY, That the taking it into our serious consideration, is the best and most effectual means to prevent the evil consequences that may otherwise attend it.

FIRST, our neglect or want of reflection, instead of making our condition better, will make it worse.—We should have just reason, indeed, never to concern ourselves about what will occur at the great day, if the waving of all thoughts, in relation to it, would prove of any service when it actually comes.—But alas!—whether we reflect on it or not, our accounts will run on, every article must be settled, and we must come to a balance at the last; and how unprovided shall we be, if we spend no time here in examining, stating, and clearing them up, as far as in us lies?—It is no small privilege, which we have by the Gospel, wherein God allows us to adjust our concerns with him in this world;—for, if we will but impartially judge ourselves, we shall never be judged, that is,—if we will but call ourselves to a strict account for our actions; if we will heartily and sincerely repent of our sins, and make our earnest supplications to God for mercy and forgiveness;—if we take care to have our *consciences cleansed by the blood of Christ*, from the pollution of our sins; then we
may

may, with joy and peace of mind, reflect on the great day of recompence:—but on the other hand, if we will never enter into ourselves,—never examine our actions, never look into the dispositions of our minds, nor charge ourselves with the guilt of those things which we have committed,—how can we ever hope to escape the scrutiny, or avoid the severity of that tremendous day?—For our accounts are continually augmenting by our shameful neglect of them, and the burthen of God's wrath must consequently be so much the heavier, when we have taken no care to diminish one article in them, but after *the hardness of our hearts, have only treasured up wrath against the day of wrath.*

SECONDLY, The consideration that God will bring us to judgment, is the best and most effectual means to prevent the fatal consequences that may otherwise attend it.—For tho' we can never hope to plead *not guilty*;—yet,—which is next in point of wisdom,—this is the most effectual motive to bring us to repentance;—and that which prevails on us to repent, makes us grow wise in time, and lays a *solid and substantial foundation for eternal life.*

THERE are many arguments to persuade us to repent; namely, the folly and shame of our sins; the wisdom of reflection and reformation;—and the many instances of it, as well as the many exhortations to it, which are recorded in the sacred Scriptures;—but there is no one carries more weight along with it, no one that touches men more, in point of interest and concernment, than this of a future judgment.—If I must (says the penitent sinner) give a strict account to God of all the civil actions of my life, and suffer according to the demerit of them, in case I die in a state of impenitency,

impenitency, how greatly then doth it behove me to repent betimes!—to repent in good earnest!—to repent whilst there are hopes of mercy!—Hence then, all ye vain allurements of this wicked world, ye have too long deluded and seduced me.—What will this empty parade, this tinselled outside of the world avail me,—when I shall be stripped of all, and stand trembling with guilt and horror before the judgment-seat of Christ?—Oh! how wretched shall I be, if my conscience condemns me, before my judge passes sentence upon me!—I am fully determined, therefore, to prevent the fatal consequences of that day;—I will accuse,—judge, and condemn myself;—nay, I will proceed to immediate execution, and instantly shake off all those vicious habits and corrupt inclinations, which lie lurking within me.—And although I cannot wholly subdue them all, yet will I nail them to the cross of Christ, and indulge myself no longer in them;—and notwithstanding they may struggle with me for a time, yet shall they never get an absolute dominion over me:—I will use my utmost endeavours, that death and judgment may find me duly prepared; and tho' I may not be perfectly innocent, yet will I sincerely repent of my former transgressions.

To conclude,—Let the consideration of this awful day of *judgment which is to come*, enter deep into our minds, and awaken us out of our lethargy.—We are naturally apt to shift off unpleasing prospects from time to time, and to pass away our hours here, in as much peace and tranquillity as possible.—But this is not the prudential part,—and the time will come when we shall highly censure our own ill conduct.—The best we can do at present is, to recover what is past by repentance, and to resolve upon making up our accounts
with

with God in this world.—We are all walking on the very brink of eternity, and know not how soon we may drop into it.—But what eternal horror and confusion must follow us, if we proceed to slight the opportunities afforded us of making our peace with him, who is to be our judge!—May God, therefore, of his infinite mercy awaken us all to a timely repentance, and then our iniquities shall not be placed to our account, but we shall appear with joy at the great tribunal, be discharged there with honour, and hear the comfortable invitation made us of *Come ye blessed of my father; receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world!*—which, that ye may all be partakers of, God of his infinite mercy grant, thro' the merits of his Son, our Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*



SUNDAY



SUNDAY X.

☞ Concerning the Abuse of Prayer.

JAMES IV, 3.

Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss.



It was a very frequent complaint of the *Israelites*, and most commonly their plea of excuse, in any religious defection, that their devotions were rarely attended with that success, which they were taught to expect from them; and that, for ought they saw, the Gods of the nations did as much, or more, for their votaries than the Lord did for them, his peculiar people,—but we well know, that there is scarce a page of their history, but can furnish a living monument of the falshood and ingratitude of the assertion.

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It is not, however, to be denied, that disappointments (as we call them) of this sort, are by no means unfrequent in the world; there are many of our prayers which seem wholly unregarded by the ear of heaven, and many a man has closed his life without the acquisition of what that life, perhaps, has been wholly spent in soliciting a grant of.

YET is not this (as many I fear make it) by any means an argument against the necessity and use of prayer: nor is there, may be, a stronger indication of the divine tenderness to short-sighted man, than that his most ardent prayers pass sometimes wholly unnoticed, or are but partially and imperfectly complied with.

PLATO will have it, that to suppose the Supreme Being can deny nothing to a zealous and earnest supplicator, is scarce a less impiety than to deny the general existence of providence, and to imagine him an absolute stranger to the transactions of our lower world.

'TWERE indeed most absurd to suppose, that every trifling petition, that is daily offered by persons of such different complexions and constitutions could be complied with.—Justice must act as well as mercy; they are attributes of equal influence in the divine nature.—Will this then indulge us in any request which may be incompatible with the general welfare of the system,—any more than it will sacrifice us to the resentments of an envious neighbour?—Will not boundless mercy be sometimes concerned, as well to reject a request, which carries unseen misery and ruin in it, as to comply with those which may be conducive to our real advantage and well-being? 'Tis not, that *he who planted the ear cannot himself bear*; 'tis not, that the hand of Omnipotence is too short

short to effect;—'tis not to a regardless and un-benevolent disposition in the Almighty, that we are to ascribe our ill success;—'tis often excess of tenderness and mercy that closes his ear on the petition.—Very happily for us, there is a Being, who is not only much more capable, than we are, of distinguishing in what our true misery or felicity is founded;—but who has indeed our welfare at heart much more than we ourselves seem to have, in the general œconomy of our lives.—*We ask and receive not, because we ask amiss.*

THE most useful method of enlarging upon these words, will (I conceive) be to enquire into the grounds and nature of our mistakes on this head, by considering how, and wherein, it is possible for us to *ask amiss*, and this, I suppose, we may do either

IN regard to the subject; or,

TO the end and purpose; or,

WITH respect to the form, manner, or method which we use in preferring our petitions.

IN regard to the subject,—we may undoubtedly be said to *ask amiss*, when we either petition for such things as we cannot be put in possession of without prejudicing some other person;—or such as may be hurtful and inconvenient to ourselves;—or such as are in themselves merely trivial, useless, and ridiculous; or lastly, in general, such things, as it would be inconsistent with any of the divine attributes to grant.

Now, if we examine our hearts, I am afraid we shall find, that no small part of our requests (perhaps a much larger than we are aware of) will come under some one of these denominations.—Upon a review, 'tis odds but the first thing we meet with (be we in what station of life we will) is wealth, or power, or grandeur, or beauty, or
I fame,

same, or some such idle toy; whether it be that we fancy we shall have better success than our neighbours, and stand exempt from their general influence; yet, spite of all the havock and confusion we daily observe them to bring both upon their possessors, and all about them, these are our polestar, and we think it may be time enough to enquire after real necessities, when we have had these in possession, and played with them 'till we are tired.

SUPPOSE then riches to be our request;—do they not too often come attended with numerous ills,—ills even worse than what the Preacher calls *vanity and vexation of spirit*,—incessant fears, inquietudes, pride, avarice, impiety, luxury, intemperance, disease and misery?—Are not these too often her concomitants? Is not to be rich, too often, only to be splendidly wretched? How much wiser was the wholesome prayer of *Agur*?—*Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest, by the influence of the latter, I grow full, and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?*

As false, as fickle, and perhaps more dangerous are the objects of ambition. Greatness creates infinitely more enemies than it can guard us from.—How trifling, and insignificant are the distresses that can reach an humble life, compared with those to which pomp and titles would daily expose us! How many thousands are there, were it possible to reckon them up, who have found their ruin in that very article, which they have pursued as the most certain security against it!—How many instances, in short, have we, where but one step has been made even from the throne to the axe or the bow-string! Where are the *Cæsar's* and *Alexander's*? Where half the *Mahomets* and *Ibrahim's* of one of the largest and most powerful empires of the known world?—He then, who cannot see, that in requests
of

of this sort, he *asks amiss*, even with respect to himself, is not so wise as *Damascus*, who chose rather to retire contentedly to his cottage, than to feast at the table of *Diomysus*, under so unpleasant, and dangerous a canopy as he proposed. In a word, we are such incompetent judges of the nature and foundation of all sublunary happiness or misery, that there is scarce a wish we can form after any created good, which, if granted, we should not quickly find reason to repent of. What were the strength of *Milo*, the beauty of *Lais*, and the eloquence of *Cicero*, but so many several snares to draw them to a more distinguished ruin?

'Tis not impossible likewise, that our prayers may be sometimes as destitute of justice, as they are void of wisdom.—Our neighbour has a fortune, a house, a field, a wife, or something that we would gladly have transferred to us, no matter upon what terms, or how he or his family are like to be affected by the loss.

SOMETIMES the objects of our prayers shall be, perhaps, the veriest trifles, the merest play-things in nature;—and sometimes, I doubt, worse than trifles have found a place, and the means and instruments of the foulest luxury and debauchery have been demanded of heaven with all the formal zeal of a devout suppliant. Is it to be wondered at, that devotions so ill-conducted, in regard to the object, or where at least false and unwarrantable requests have so large a part, should be successful?—Nay, is it to be wondered at, if even those petitions, which are founded in justice and virtue, should sometimes be lost in the groupe, and perish in the storm, which is raised by their wicked companions?

BUT the most simple and warrantable thing in nature, requested for an ill purpose, becomes un-

reasonable and unwarrantable, and turns the most fervent prayer into sin.—A very moderate proportion of the gifts of fortune, if wanted only as the source and minister of vice and luxury ;—freedom and independence, the most eligible, and perhaps the most reasonable wish in nature ;—if but to render us the more securely vicious ;—even wisdom itself, if all we want it for is but to enable us the better to defraud, or with the greater grace, to despise our fellow-creatures, are no more to be indulged us, consistently with the divine attributes, than if they were, what, to be sure, they are not,—things naturally and intrinsically wicked and unreasonable.

IN short, with respect to the matter of our prayers ;—as it is impossible for us to avoid mistakes, and sometimes very gross ones, it will always be our best way to leave that Being, who is too wise not to know what is best for us, and too just and merciful not to give it us, if we can on any account be said to deserve it. There are doubtless, however, many things, which we may particularly request of heaven, consistently with the strictest reason, and most unblemished innocence ;—such, for instance, is deliverance from any particular calamity, —a moderate proportion of worldly necessities, —or any kind of moral or religious perfection, which we may find ourselves particularly deficient in ; however, before we prefer any petition whatever, —we should do well to weigh it justly with ourselves, to consider seriously whether what we are about to ask may be consistent with our own virtue or welfare to beg, or God's justice and mercy to grant, and never let our desires be the rule of our prayers, unless reason and religion be first the rule of our desires.

CEASE

CEASE then to be thus inordinately and incessantly anxious after the means and ministers of a false and precarious happiness; weary not heaven with prayers, that never can be complied with;—so long as ye ask amiss, ye can never receive;—so far from tiring heaven, trouble not even yourselves with a thought of what ye shall eat, what ye shall drink, or what ye shall put on;—requests which besit only the mouth of the heathen worshipper, or the ear of his impure and sensual deity, the God of this world.—Ask ye not for stones and serpents, things pernicious in their nature;—but I will tell you what ye shall ask, with the most lively certainty of not being disappointed.—Seek ye then the kingdom of God and his righteousness,—the means of virtue, piety, and honour,—and all those things which ye are now so anxious about, shall (as far as they are just and requisite) be much sooner given you, than when they were the sole purport of all your words, thoughts and wishes.

THE last article, in which we may be said to ask amiss, is with respect to the form and manner of preferring our petitions. If this be not right, not all the justice and equity of the petition itself, either in regard to the subject of it, or the end for which it is made, can render it a reasonable and acceptable service: the most reasonable request in the world, made either in an imperious, petulant, or irreverent manner, is not fit to be complied with; there are, therefore, certain requisites to be constantly and uniformly observed, in order to render the great duty of prayer efficacious and successful.

THE first of these is undoubtedly *faith*, that is, a general faith.—*He who cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those*

who diligently seek him. Without this, 'tis needless to add, that a man cannot be guilty of a greater absurdity than to pray. On the contrary, there is no little stress to be laid on any tolerable degree of this qualification; *Be it unto you according to your faith,* saith our Saviour;—*Let a man ask in faith,* saith the Apostle; and again, *if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that* (provided they be in all other respects duly regulated) *we have the petitions which we desired of him.*

THE second requisite is general righteousness, a constant and settled habit of piety and holiness;—*If I incline unto wickedness with my heart* (says the Psalmist very justly) *the Lord will not hear me.*—The man who spends the greatest part of his life in the service of *Mammon*, comes but with an ill grace before the throne of God. Contempt and disobedience, are but cold pleas to the favour and indulgence of our prince;—nor should we ourselves, I suppose, be over-ready to grant the request of a man, whose general behaviour had tended to prove him wholly unworthy of our favour or concern;—'tis well, if the prayers of such be not not turned into curses;—they must not, however, wonder if they receive not; because, 'tis certain, that if they ask at all, without this requisite, they ask very much amiss.

THE third requisite is humility, which consists in a due sense of our vileness and insignificance, and the infinite disproportion between us, and the great Being to whom we are paying our addresses. There is nothing which disqualifies a man for the receipt of human benefits so much, as a saucy and imperious way of asking them;—there is nothing due to us from heaven;—the best of us all is but an unprofitable servant;—nor doth the highest pitch of earthly grandeur raise us, in this respect above the
common

common level;—the man who values himself upon any eminence of his station in life, must be told, that it will stand him in no stead here; dress and titles are not the key to the presence-chamber of our common Lord, with whom *there is no respect of persons.*—*The prayer of the humble* it is which pierceth the clouds, and will not depart till the most high regard it; and to him who is of a pure and contrite spirit, and who trembleth at his word,—will the Lord much sooner look, even in a dungeon, than to the saucy and petulant demands of the proud, tho' attended with all the pageantry and parade that power may command, or riches purchase.

A FOURTH requisite is earnestness or attention of mind.—The heart, so far from being excluded from a share in our devotions, should rather have much the largest;—the lip, the hand, the knee, may better be excused; but here the tie is inviolable;—*with the mouth*, indeed, a man may make confession unto salvation,—but 'tis *with the heart* that he must believe unto righteousness. This is to the Almighty what the lips are to our fellow-creature, the proper instrument of speech; with this, our best of members, must he be addressed, and how florid and eloquent soever be our speech, how well turned soever our periods, how pompous and solemn soever our expressions, to the rectitude or obliquity of this alone, will he have regard.

To this attention must be added perseverance and frequency in the action;—we must not only pray, but *continue in prayer*, be *daily in the temple*,—do it *without ceasing*. The importunate widow, in the parable, gained her cause by this means, when she had found all others unsuccessful;—for tho' the most steady and obstinate zeal (if I may be allowed the expression) cannot be properly said to effect an alteration in that Being, who is Immu-

tability in the abstract, to revoke the determined purposes of God;—yet it certainly works a very essential change in our merits,—and qualifies us the better for the receipt of those favours, which he has from all eternity determined to bestow on such as *ask according to his will*.

THO' there are requisites which ought to attend the devotions of the christian in common with those of the rest of mankind; yet there is another to be considered, which is peculiar to himself, *viz.* That whatever he asketh, he should ask all in that name, which alone, of all under heaven, can be efficacious to his success. The Blessed Jesus hath assured us, that *whatsoever we shall ask in his name, shall be granted*.—Hence this becomes the necessary seal and recommendation; and that prayer which has every other requisite, if deficient in this, may, with respect to us at least, be said to be amiss.

I THINK I should have added, as a requisite to the right performance of this duty of prayer, that it should be conceived in a due, that is, a decent and reverent form of words,—not crowded with senseless and impertinent tautologies,—larded with mean, fulsome, or ridiculous conceits, but composed in the most nervous and pathetic terms; yet, at the same time, in all the plain and simple elegancies of the respective languages in which it is preferred.

I THINK I may now venture to affirm, that with all these requisites, no man has ever asked and not received. Such of his prayers as have been unsuccessful, have, most assuredly, been unduly regulated, in some one or more of these respects;—either what he has asked, has been unsafe or improper for him to receive,—or incompatible with the welfare of some other part of the system, and therefore

therefore inconsistent with the divine attributes to grant;—or else his petitions have been offered in such a manner, as it would have misbecome the majesty of heaven to have paid any regard to them;—in some respect or other he must have asked amiss, or else 'tis impossible but he should have received;—for just and holy is the most high, who giveth to all men liberally,—provided they *ask according to his will*.—Thou therefore, O Almighty, and inexhaustible fountain of wisdom, who knowest our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking,—have compassion, we beseech thee, on our infirmities; and those things, which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot, ask, vouchsafe to give us, for the worthiness of thy Son Jesus Christ,—to whom with thee and the Holy Spirit, be blessing, and glory, and thanksgiving for ever and ever. *Amen.*



SUNDAY

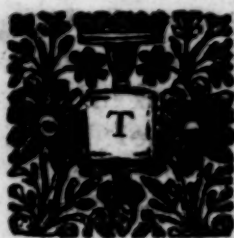


SUNDAY XI.

* * Sincerity towards God and Man
illustrated.

GENESIS VI. 9.

Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.



HO the heathen world, upon the strength of their natural reason only, and before any law was delivered by God to his servant *Moses*, unanimously, indeed, acknowledged a Supreme Being; yet how faint, how imperfect, were the ideas they entertained of his infinite perfections! They were conscious to themselves, it is true, that he was their creator, and that all the blessings they enjoyed flowed entirely from him, and that, in gratitude, therefore, they were indispensably bound to revere so indulgent, and so bountiful a benefactor;

benefactor; but then, how absurd, how superstitious; nay, how monstrously impious, and sometimes inhuman, were they, in their publick oblations to him on their altars! How lost and bewildered were the most learned amongst them, in their researches after true happiness! Their thirst after it, indeed, was very eager and impatient; nay, almost insatiable. They trod the labyrinths of their vain and empty philosophy over and over, in hopes to find rest, but alas! they found none; and were no wiser, in short, at last, than when they first set out.

THE chief aim, therefore, of the Almighty in the revelation of his divine will, both in the *Old and New Testament*, was, to give them, after all their fruitless toil and fatigue, an unerring rule for them to walk by, an infallible guide to direct them, without the least danger of their deviation from the right path, in their pursuit after such a happiness, as was adequate to the nature, and commensurate with the warmest wishes of an immortal Being. And that nothing might be wanting in those sacred Scriptures, to answer all these wise and important purposes, we find, interspersed throughout those sacred writings, not only the most perfect rules and precepts prescribed for the regulation of our conduct in this world, and our attainment of everlasting happiness in that which is to come; but we see likewise those precepts drawn out to the life, and most strenuously recommended to our imitation by the most illustrious examples.

AND amongst the many glorious instances that might be produced of an unaffected piety and sanctity of manners, no one can be more remarkable, I humbly conceive, than this of the patriarch *Noah* in the text; for, notwithstanding in his days, all the graces of the mind were unfashionable

able accomplishments, and the objects of universal contempt; though nothing was regarded but the gratification of their sensual appetites; though the whole world, in short, was at that time grown so dissolute and abandoned, so impious and prophane, and the measure of their iniquity was so full, that it repented the Lord, as we are told in the words immediately preceding the text, that he had made man upon the earth, and it grieved him at his heart; and the Lord said, *I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them: yet Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.* And the true reason assigned for it in the text is this; that notwithstanding *Noah* was perfectly derided, and looked upon only as a weak, wild enthusiast, and a religious old dotard by all around him; yet, regardless of all the indignities that were offered him, he was resolutely bent to have such a strict regard over all his actions, as to deserve the amiable character here given of him; namely, *that he was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and walked with God.*

THIS walking of our good patriarch *with God*, demonstrated the truth and sincerity of his piety towards him; and tho' all the world, besides himself, despised him, and blasphemed his holy name; yet he would never be prejudiced, or over-ruled by the headstrong and unthinking multitude; but would be immoveable in his resolution, to believe in God, and to honour and revere him. He was solicitous, above all things, to testify, that the external expressions of his piety and obedience to his divine will, were the genuine result and product, not only of his internal fear and apprehensions of him, but of his warmest affections and unfeigned

unfeigned love towards him: and that *Noah* was a man of a substantial and unaffected piety, and in reality what he professed himself to be, is plain and evident, beyond all contradiction, from his *finding grace in the eyes of the Lord*, at a time, when he was so highly provoked, that he was resolutely bent to destroy the whole race of mankind by an universal deluge, as a just punishment due to their demerits; and that in the height of his indignation, he was graciously pleased to make our good patriarch an exception to his general resentment. And forasmuch as sincerity is the very heart and substance of religion, it highly concerns us, not only to endeavour after this holy frame of mind, but to enquire into the nature and properties belonging to it; by virtue whereof, men may know when their hearts are sincere, when they walk uprightly with God, and when their piety is an acceptable service in his sight. And I shall here enumerate some few of the many properties that might be produced, whereby we may be enabled, not only to know when our minds are rightly disposed, but to reap the comfort likewise of so happy a disposition.

IN the first place then, our piety may be said to be unaffected and sincere, when an awful sense of God's authority over us, and our obedience to his commands, are the principal motives to our being religious; when we dread, as we ought, his menaces and displeasure; and live in the comfortable hopes of those glorious rewards, which he has promised shall be conferred on all such as sincerely, and without the least reluctance, are obedient to his divine will.

THIS piety, in the next place, must be implanted in the heart, and be a living principle within us; and unless it be so rooted, all external acts of devotion,

devotion, are nothing better than hypocrisy and dissimulation; the shadow, not the substance, of religion, the form only, in short, of godliness, and not the power of it.

A THIRD evidence of an unaffected piety is this, when we walk with God in private, as well as when we make open profession of it before men. He may properly be said to be truly devout, who makes a conscience of *walking with God*, as well when he is alone in his closet, and where he has no witness but God and himself, as when he joins with a numerous assembly in the worship of God in his holy temple. And if he be not the same man, and does not act with the same fervency and zeal for God's honour and glory at home, as he does abroad, he may rationally conclude, that he is so far from being a religious man, that he is no better than a Pharisee; that his devotion is all hypocritical, and complied with on no other account, than, as he imagines, it will contribute towards his own worldly interest, and will gain him the applause of all good men.

WE give another evidence of our sincere piety, when it becomes habitual, and when no motives, how advantageous soever, can in the least induce us to swerve from our first resolution; when a truly pious, sincere man shews, that he is no ways biassed and prepossessed in regard to his obedience to God's laws; when he pays the same regard to all God's commandments in general, and indulges himself in the breach, or neglect, of no one in particular; for the Apostle St. *James* assures us, that he who keeps the whole law, saving that he offends in one point, is guilty of all.

HAVING thus considered sincerity, in regard to our duty towards God, as fully as the brevity of our design will admit, I shall now proceed to illustrate

illustrate that sincerity, which, in particular, respects our conduct and deportment towards our fellow-creatures.

THE just and perfect man, then, such as *Noah* was, is one, that is upright and sincere; one, who makes a plain, open, and constant declaration of the truth, without the least mental reservation; whose professions go hand in hand with all his purposes; whose tongue, at all times, utters the dictates of his heart; one, who scorns to act in disguise, and abhors hypocrisy; one, in short, whose words have no double meaning, and whose conscience is void of offence towards God and towards man.

SINCERITY, therefore, is what, in other terms, we call simplicity of mind; that quality, which, however contemptible it may appear in the eyes of wicked men, is highly recommended to us in the sacred Scriptures.

ST. *Paul* assures us, that 'tis the distinguishing character of a true christian; and for that reason, we find, he appeals to his conscience, in regard to his own deportment, and peremptorily insists, that he *had his conversation in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but with the grace of God.*

IN imitation, therefore, of that Apostle, let us take peculiar care to use truth and plainness in all our words and doings; let our tongues be ever the true interpreters of our minds, and our expressions the lively image of our thoughts and affections; and let our outward actions prove, in all respects, conformable to our inward intentions.

As this amiable virtue, however, of sincerity and simplicity of heart, seems to be too much despised, and looked upon as a very unfashionable and unpolite accomplishment in this degenerate age,

age, it is highly requisite, that we should be more warm and sanguine than ordinary in the recommendation of it. And in order thereto, I shall add some few considerations to set it in the fairest and most advantageous light.

AND first, give me leave to observe, that 'tis the highest character that can be conferred on any man living; that 'tis the solid foundation of all happiness; the heart and soul of all goodness; and in several places, both in the *Old and New Testament*, is delineated under the term *Perfection* itself. As for instance, *Noah*, here in our text, is stiled both a *just* and *perfect* man. *Jacob*, long after him, was distinguished by the name of a *plain man*. Our Blessed Saviour, speaking of *Nathaniel*, gives him the character of an *Israelite* indeed; that is, a plain, perfect, honest man, and *one, in whom there was no guile*. And the Apostle, *St. Peter*, mentions this most amiable quality, as the principal ingredient in the character of the best man that ever breath'd upon the face of the earth; I mean, our Blessed Saviour himself, *who did no sin* (says he) *neither was guile found in his mouth*.

ANOTHER commendation of this exalted virtue is, that 'tis, I fear, but very seldom to be met with. A perfectly sincere, honest, and open-hearted man is a novelty, not exposed every day to publick view. Our Saviour speaks of it himself, in regard to the instance abovementioned given of *Nathaniel*, as an extraordinary thing, as an occurrence very uncommon; and for that reason, it very justly calls for our peculiar attention and regard.

IN the next place, 'tis observable, that the want of sincerity will render all our piety fruitless, and of no avail. All our external obedience to God's laws, if not animated by sincerity, is like a sacrifice

crifice without a heart, which is an abomination unto the Lord.

AGAIN, we ought to consider, that nothing is so foolish, so vain a thing as insincerity and dissimulation. For truth and simplicity have all the advantages of appearance, and many more. "If the shew of any thing (says Dr. Tillotson) be good, sure I am, sincerity is better. For why does any man dissemble, or seem to be that which he is not, but because he thinks it good to have such a quality as he pretends to? For to counterfeit and dissemble is to put on the appearance of some excellency. Now, the best way in the world for a man to seem to be any thing, is really to be what he would seem to be. Besides, it is many times as troublesome to make good the pretence of a good quality as to have it; and if a man have it not, it is ten to one but he is discovered to want it, and then all his pains and labour to seem to have it is lost. There is something unnatural in painting, which a skilful eye will easily discern from native beauty and complexion".

AGAIN, let me advise you to consider, that the wiser a man is, the more distinctly will he discern how serviceable sincerity is to all the great ends and purposes of human life; and that man has made no small proficiency in the school of wisdom, who esteems truth and sincerity according to their merit.

IN the last place, let us consider, that as the duration of our lives is at best but very short and precarious, it is not worth our while to practise the arts of hypocrisy and dissimulation. With what valuable view should we study to be so artful and designing, when we cannot be assured, that they will avail us any thing for any considerable

derable time? To what wise end and purpose should any man act in disguise, and conceal his judgment; or, in contradiction to it, why should he at once incur the displeasure of the Almighty, and act against the dictates of his own conscience, which will most assuredly sting him, and render his guilt a burden too heavy for him to bear? Why, I say, should he act thus indiscreetly, especially if he does but reflect, that all his artifice and deceit shall one day be laid open to the eyes of all the world; before God, angels, and men, to his eternal shame and confusion? *For at that day God will bring every work into judgment; and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Nothing is now covered, which shall not then be revealed, nor hid, which shall not then be known.*

To conclude, there is so close a connexion between unaffected piety and sanctity of manners, that they ought for ever to be inseparable, and go hand in hand.

It was an exhortation of St. Peter's to his converts, that they would *add to their faith—virtue*; where, by *faith*, he, doubtless, means an implicit acquiescence in all the divine truths, that are revealed in the Sacred Scriptures, which, here in our text, is called *walking with God*; and by the term *virtue*, there made use of, he implies the sincere practice of all moral goodness, which, in our text, is called justice and perfection; or in other words,—downright honesty, without the least tincture of guile. Uprightness and simplicity of manners are absolutely requisite to make a compleat and good christian; for one without the other, would be nothing but hypocrisy and dissimulation, which, as we have before observed, are an abomination to the Lord.

AND

AND that there is that close connection between them, the great author and finisher of our faith has declared, that *without virtue our faith is unfinished*. Repentance must go hand in hand with faith: Our Saviour himself has required that it should be so; and the Apostle has exhorted his hearers after him to *add the one to the other*, and what the authority of God hath joined together, let no man dare to put asunder.

THE same word of God, that assures us, without holiness (*i. e.* virtue) *no man shall see the Lord*, hath told us likewise, that *without faith it is impossible to please God*: which is the same thing, as if it were said, unless we walk with God, and live in the true love and fear of his holy name, all our external services will never avail us any thing. The simplicity of the heart is that alone which will render the tribute of our adoration acceptable in his sight. The same Scripture which asserts *the wrath of God to be revealed against all unrighteousness and all ungodly men*, assures us, that *the just* (that is the virtuous) *shall live by faith*; and *he that believeth shall be saved*; but *he that believeth not* (that is, he who is not a christian indeed, in simplicity of heart, without guile or deceit) *shall be damned*.

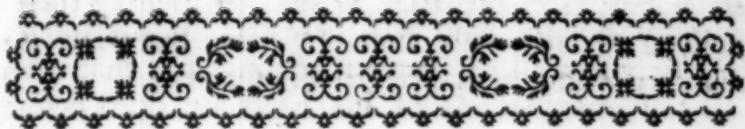
SINCE, therefore, faith and virtue are enjoined by the same divine authority, and under the very same sanction, the close connection and mutual dependance of unaffected piety and sanctity of manners are so plain and evident, that they ought never to be parted. If we know these things (and unless we be perfect strangers to the Sacred Scriptures, we cannot but know them) happy are we, if *we add them together*, and build the one upon the other; but if, on the other hand, we totally reject, or neglect either of them; if we refuse to

embrace those truths, which the Scriptures have proposed, as the objects of our faith; or to perform those duties which are therein required at our hands, for the trial of our obedience, then shall we live not only unhappy here, but what is infinitely worse, unhappy to all eternity;

WHICH God of his infinite mercy prevent, thro' the merits of his dearly beloved Son, to whom be ascribed all honour and glory, for ever and ever. *Amen.*



SUNDAY



SUNDAY XII.

Concerning the Government of the Thoughts.

I CHRON. XXVIII. 9. Part.

The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.



SOME very pious and good christians are very apt to be greatly alarmed and disturbed at wicked and impure thoughts, which sometimes, notwithstanding their utmost endeavours, will arise in their minds; and on the other hand, as the wicked and inconsiderate are too apt to encourage, and to take complacency and delight in such thoughts as are abominable and odious in the sight of the Almighty; the words of my text may afford comfort and consolation to the one, and, if at all considered

dered, confound and abash the other ; for what a dreadful prospect must it afford a wicked person, if he could be brought to reflect, that an Almighty Being, who will hereafter be his judge, not only sees all his impious actions, but that even all the imaginations of his heart are open before him ?—The good man, however, has great reason to be satisfied and comforted, when he considers, that *the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts* ; for then may he be well assured, that none shall be imputed to him, as sinful, that enter into his mind involuntarily, and against his inclination.

IN discoursing therefore on these words, I shall lay before you some cursory reflections on the government of the thoughts, as they fall under a religious consideration.

IN treating of this argument, there seems to me to be two things highly requisite to be done.

FIRST, To shew what power a man hath over his own thoughts, And,

SECONDLY, To shew wherein the government of them doth principally consist.

It is indeed this second article, which I propose more particularly to dwell upon ; but I cannot speak of that to any purpose, 'till I have made way for it by clearing up the first ; for it would be in vain to prescribe rules about the government of our thoughts, 'till we know how far we have power over them, how far they fall, or do not fall, under our care and conduct.

THE first question then is, how far a man hath power over his own thoughts. There is not, indeed, any one single answer to be given to this question

question that will suit every person; since that is impossible. It would be as unreasonable to demand it, as it would be to require of a workman to make a garment that should fit every one, let his stature or bulk be what it will.

SOME men, by the very principles of their frame and constitution, are much better qualified to govern their thoughts than others; some, who are naturally weaker, have by long habit and frequent trials, obtained a greater command over their thoughts than others. Again, the same individual persons, who at some particular times, have a great power over the motions of their minds, may, at other times, according as their health, or their business, or a hundred other contingencies, shall happen to affect them, may be incapable of subduing them; so that all that can be done, as to this particular, is to lay down some general propositions, which each person is to apply to himself, as occasion shall require. And here I have five to offer, which, I think, will take in all, or at least the greatest part of what belongs to the point in hand.

THE first proposition then that I shall lay down is this, that the first motions of our minds are very little, if at all, in our power.

By these first motions, I mean those sudden thoughts or apprehensions, passions, or desires, which are excited in our minds by any object at that time presented to our imagination: as to these, I say, we are not so much masters of ourselves as to be able to stop them; nay, notwithstanding they may possibly be very irregular. And the reason is, because they are produced so quick, that there is not time enough given for reason to interpose.

THERE is no necessity, indeed, that a man should give his assent to these motions; but as to their coming into his mind, he can no more prevent it, than he can help his present frame or disposition, or the circumstances in which he is then engaged.

THUS, for instance, do you think it possible for a man of a hot and choleric temper, to avoid the feeling of a sudden resentment arising in his mind, if he meets with any unexpected affront, or other high provocation? Or for a man, who desires to be well thought of, not to entertain some vanity or imagination, when he hears himself either justly applauded, or indeed flattered? And thus, in all other cases, it is much the same. I grant, indeed, that a man may, by a long series of reflection, and by a constant and uninterrupted practice of virtue and piety, bring himself to that temper, that he shall not have so many irregular motions in his own mind upon any occasion whatsoever, as once he used to have; and that those which were formerly temptations to him, will at last prove none at all; but still, I say, the first motions and operations of his mind, however occasioned, are in a great measure out of his power; he cannot prevent them; they will have their course; and therefore the art of governing his thoughts doth not lie there.

THE second proposition I lay down is this, when a man's mind is vigorously affected and possessed, either with the outward objects of sense, or with any inward passions, be they what they will, in either of those cases, he hath little or no command of his thoughts. His mind, at that time, will in a manner be wholly taken up with the object or passion about which it is employed; nor will he be capable, till those impressions are in some degree

gree worn off, of thinking with freedom, and without restraint. Thus, for instance, when a man is afflicted with a sharp fit of the gout or the stone, as he cannot but feel the pain, so he must unavoidably think of it; when again he is full of grief for the loss of a dear relation, or transported with passion for some unworthy treatment he hath met with; it is to no purpose to desire him not to think of those insults or distresses; for they must of necessity, and will, in a great measure, employ his thoughts till his passion cools, and the impressions that it made on his mind be vanished.

THUS for a man to come immediately from the transaction of some temporal affair, wherein his interest is very deeply concerned, or from the hearing some very good, or extraordinary bad news; I say, to come immediately from either of these to his private devotions, I could not, I should not wonder in the least, if his mind should be ruffled and discomposed, notwithstanding all his endeavours to perform his duty as he ought.

For such is the nature of man, that he cannot turn his mind so suddenly from one transaction to another; but that, if he closely and vigorously applied himself to the first, his thoughts will for some time run thereupon, even after he hath applied his mind to the second.

I do not deny, but that a man may possibly so order his affairs, as to be capable of keeping his mind clear and disengaged from such prepossessions as I have been speaking of; so as that, when he comes to apply himself to any business his inclination leads him to, he may pursue it with all his might.—But this I say, if our minds be once warmly engaged about any one thing whatsoever, it is very hard, if not morally impossible, to get them immediately disengaged. So that the art of governing

governing our thoughts doth not much lie in that particular neither.

THIRDLY, there are some cases likewise, where a man's thoughts are in a manner forced upon him, from the present temper and indisposition of his body: so that, tho' he be in no passion; tho' there be no unusual objects of sense to excite those thoughts in him; nay, tho' he never so fully determines not to think upon those things; yet so long as that habit of body lasts, so long he cannot refrain from those kind of thoughts: so that in this case likewise, there is but little room left for the government of his thoughts.

THAT which I now advance happens frequently, not only in all sorts of distempers, where the brain is visibly disturbed, as in calentures, raging fevers, and the like, which often cause a thousand delirious fancies, and sometimes downright madness and distraction; but also in other cases, where there seems to be no fever, or other visible distemper; nor doth the brain, as to other matters, seem to be at all disordered; but the persons to all outward appearance are found both in body and mind.

AND this is the case of some low-spirited and dejected persons, many of whom will be haunted with a set of gloomy thoughts and fancies, that they can by no means shake off, tho' they ever so earnestly desire it.

SOMETIMES they cannot forbear thinking, but that they are atheists and infidels; that they neither believe in God, nor in *Jesus Christ*; nor have any sense at all of religion.

SOMETIMES they are tormented with blasphemous thoughts, and they cannot set themselves to the performance of any act of devotion, but a
thousand

thousand impious fancies will intervene, and overthrow all their good intentions.

SOMETIMES they imagine themselves guilty of several heinous crimes, whereof, it is to be hoped, it was hardly possible for them to be guilty; nay, they will not be persuaded, but that they actually commit some of these crimes, because they imagine they give their assent to them.

AND whilst these melancholy and perplexing thoughts find a place in their imaginations, there is not a chapter in the Bible that they read, or a Sermon that they hear, but they find some passage in it, which they so perversely apply to their own case, as thereby they only encrease their sorrow and anxiety of mind.

WHAT now is to be said to this?—Why, it is very certain, that all these gloomy thoughts and chimæras are forced upon them, and are not the free, natural, voluntary operations of their own minds, but the effects of vapours or hypochondriac melancholy. Nor can the persons themselves any more help their thinking in this perverse manner, than they can prevent the distractions that occur in their dreams, when they are disposed to sleep in peace and tranquillity; we may, with propriety enough, indeed, call these fancies of theirs their waking dreams, as their dreams are their sleeping fancies.

WELL! But now these people, of all others, are most desirous to have rules prescribed to them for the government of their thoughts. And who can blame them, since their thoughts are so very troublesome and uneasy? But were we to speak pertinently to their case, instead of giving them advice, in regard to the regulation of their thoughts, we should rather persuade them to look after their bodies, and by the help of some salutary prescriptions
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to get rid of those fumes and vapours, which create these fancies: when the cause is removed, the effect will soon cease. I do not in the least doubt, whatever these people may think of their own case, but that this is as properly a bodily disease, as a fever, or a fit of the falling-sickness.

IN the mean time, whilst they are in this uncomfortable condition, whatever rules are proper to be prescribed to other persons for the government of their thoughts, those rules concern them the least of any persons living. For those thoughts which they thus complain of, fall under no regulation or government; because they are suggested to their minds involuntarily, and by compulsion. And for my part, I think it much more adviseable (if it could be) to neglect and despise them.

BUT you will say, if men be such slaves to their thoughts, and are thus necessarily passive under them, where is the freedom of thought? To this I answer, in the fourth place, we have liberty of thinking, and may chuse our own thoughts, except in the three cases before-mentioned. And that liberty or freedom, which we have in thinking, to my apprehension, principally consists in this; *viz.* that all of us, who are not in the circumstances I have been hitherto speaking of, can, if we please, apply our minds more vigorously to one thing than to another; and accordingly as we do thus apply our minds, so will the current of our thoughts be.

IT is in our power, amongst the multitude of objects, which present themselves to our view, as for instance, good, virtue, holiness, heaven, wealth, power, greatness, preferments, fine cloaths, splendid equipage, sensual pleasures, recreations, diversifements, knowledge, learning, arts, and the like; I say, that amongst all this multitude of objects
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that present themselves to our minds, it is in our power to determine which of them we will dwell upon, and make our principal pursuit. And accordingly, when at any time we have pitched upon one of them as an employment, it is in our power to pursue that scheme, with more or less vigour, as we see convenient. And if it be such a one as we are determined in good earnest to pursue, it will then so possess our minds, as that by attending thereto, we shall either prevent, in a great measure, other thoughts from intruding themselves upon us, or if they do, they will not rest long in our minds, but will soon give place to that which is our principal aim and design at that time.

AND the reason of this is very obvious; because our natures are so composed, that two things at once cannot well possess our minds; and therefore, if we be intent about one thing, we cannot have much room or leisure for thoughts of another nature.

BUT then fifthly and lastly, tho' what I have said be the true nature of that power, we have over our thoughts, as to the direction of them to a particular object; yet there is another power we have over them that ought here more especially to be considered; because therein are laid the very foundations of virtue and vice, and on account thereof all our thoughts become either morally good or evil.

THAT which I mean is this. Tho' we cannot, in many cases, think always as we ought; nay, tho' we cannot prevent abundance of thoughts from coming into our minds against our inclinations; yet it is always in our power either to assent to, or dissent from them. And here it is that the morality of our thoughts commences. According as we assent or dissent to the motions that
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are made in our minds, so will our thoughts entertain the idea of virtue or vice.

WHEN any temptations are presented to us from without, we cannot, perhaps, (as I said before) avoid the feeling an irregular passion, or motion, or inclination stirring within us on that occasion; but yet at that very time it is in our power, whether we will comply with those passions and inclinations, or not; whether we will pursue them any farther, or decline them. Now, if we do not consent to them, but endeavour to stifle and resist them, as soon as we perceive their rising, there is as yet no real harm done. Our thoughts, how irregular soever they might be, are rather to be accounted the infirmities of our corrupt nature, than our sins, properly so called.

AND thus it is likewise as to our wandering thoughts in our prayers. If we strive against them, and endeavour to keep our minds in a devout, composed temper, and attend, as well as we can, to the duty we are about; I say, if we do this, I hope those distractions and wanderings will never rise up in judgment against us.

AND as for the frightful, blasphemous fancies, which, as I told you, some, even truly pious persons, are tormented with; as to them, I say, they, of all other irregular thoughts, have the least danger of sin in them, tho' they be not so solemnly and formally disputed with, and contested against. Because indeed they are so shocking in their own nature, that no man, who is in his right senses, and hath any notion of God or goodness can be supposed to consent to them. They are indeed great *infelicities*, but by no means sins, any farther than we approve of them; and for any tolerable good man to approve of them is impossible.

BUT

BUT then, on the other hand, if we consent to any wicked motion or inclination which we feel in ourselves, let it come in which way it will, ever so suddenly, or ever so unexpectedly; yet if we close with any thought that prompts us to evil, so as to be pleased with it, to take complacency in it, or think of pursuing it, till we bring it into action; in that case, we have no right to plead our original corruption; for in that very instant we become actual sinners, actual transgressors of the law of God, the obligation of which reaches to our very hearts and thoughts, as well as our actions. However, we are not so great transgressors, so long as our sin is only in thought, desire, or, purpose, as if it had proceeded to outward action.

ALL this is taught us for true divinity, by no less an author than St. James, in the first chapter of his epistle, v. 13, 14, 15, *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God tempteth no man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

WHICH passage of the Apostle plainly contains these three propositions.

FIRST, That no man is induced to commit sin by any state or condition that God hath put him into; no, not by any temptation; either outward or inward, that is presented to him. It is not a sin to be tempted; no, nor to feel that we are tempted by some disorderly inclination that arises in our minds thereupon.

BUT secondly, then our sins begin, when we yield to the temptation, when we are drawn away by our own lusts, and enticed; when they get the
victory

144 *Concerning the Government, &c.*

victory over us, and we consent to them. *Thien lust hath conceived, and bringeth forth sin.*

BUT thirdly, tho' the very consent of our wills to a temptation be a sin in us; yet that sin is not so great as it will be afterwards, if it be brought to action. Sin, in the desire or purpose, is but an embryo; it is but the first rudiments of sin; but when put in actual execution, it is then a sin in its full dimensions; and the consequences of it may prove fatal without repentance. *Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

HAVING thus given some account how far our hearts or thoughts fall under government, I shall now proceed to the second point proposed, that is, to treat of the art of governing them; or to lay down the necessary rules and directions, which are to be observed in order thereunto; but as I propose to treat somewhat largely on that article, I shall make it the subject of the ensuing discourse.



SUNDAY.



SUNDAY XIII.

Concerning the Government of the
Thoughts.

I CHRON. XXVIII. 9.

*The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understand-
eth all the imaginations of the thoughts.*



HAVING in my last dis-
course given some account how
far our hearts or thoughts fall
under our government: I now
come to the second article
proposed, which is to treat of
the art of governing them; or
to lay down the necessary rules
and directions which are to be observed in order
thereunto.

AND we shall not need to go far for these rules;
for they will all naturally flow from the principles
I have already laid down: and I think they may

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with propriety enough be reduced likewise to these five following.

FIRST, From what has been said, it appears, that the first and great point to be done by us, if we would keep our hearts in a good frame, and order our thoughts to good purposes, is, that we rightly pitch our main design; that we chuse that for the great business of our lives, which in reality ought to be so.

Now, what that is can bear no dispute with any man, who will fairly make use of his reason; for, doubtless, that which is our greatest concernment in the world ought to be our principal business and design.

AND it is evident to every one, who believes he hath a soul to be saved, that his greatest concernment of all is, to approve himself to God, who made him, and disposes of all his affairs; and who accordingly, as we sincerely endeavour, or neglect to serve him, will make us either very happy or very miserable, both in this life, and that which is to come: so that there can, as I said, be no dispute about what ought to be the great business and design of our whole lives, and to which all other business must give way.

Now, if we be so wise, as really to propose this as our chief end, and resolve to mind it, and follow it as such; I say, if we be so wise as to do this; we have made a very great step towards the obtaining a security to ourselves, that the greatest part of our thoughts and affections will be such as they should be; such as will be acceptable to God, and satisfactory to ourselves.

FOR, as I told you before, whatever is our main business, be it what it will, it will in a great measure draw all our thoughts to it. Our natures
are

are so contrived, that we must always be thinking of something or other: but then they are so disposed likewise, that we must think of that principally, which is most in our eye, most in our esteem, and most in our pursuit. And this is that which our Saviour tells us, *where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*. Whatever it be that you place your happiness in, there your thoughts will center; upon that will your desires, your inclinations, your affections be fixed.

WE have numberless instances of the truth of this every day before our eyes. If a man hath set his heart on filthy lucre, and proposes to make it the sole business of his life to be rich; I dare say, such a one will readily acknowledge, that the whole bent of his thoughts are biased to that project; and that he finds it so far from being difficult to keep his mind close and steady to his main interest, as he calls it, that it is rather difficult to him to think of any thing else.

IF a man be devoted to his pleasures, is it not natural to such a one to bend all his thoughts that way? Or, doth he put any violence upon himself, in thinking and contriving all the day long how to accomplish the gratification of his inordinate and unruly appetites?

WHY, my brethren, if we did all of us in good earnest make the service of God, and the purchase of heaven and happiness to ourselves, as much our business, our end, our design, as these men make wealth or pleasure theirs, we should certainly be thus affected. The common course of our thoughts would naturally and easily, without the least constraint, run upon those objects; and we should take as great delight in thinking of our treasure, and contriving for the obtaining it, as

they do in thinking and projecting how to accomplish their worldly views.

THUS, I say, it would be with us. For I cannot apprehend what charms there can be in worldly or sensual things, to attract a man's mind; what fetters there can be in them, to bind his thoughts and tie them to themselves; but that there are the same, or greater in virtue and goodness; in the love and favour of God; in a pure conscience here, and eternal glory hereafter: always provided, that they are as much made the objects of our choice, and pursuit as the other.

AND therefore I cannot but suspect, where we see men so very cold and backward to spiritual things, and so apt to spend all their thoughts upon trifling, vain, or worldly matters; that it is with a great deal of pains and reluctance, that they can bring themselves to think of their everlasting concerns: I cannot, I say, but suspect, that these persons have not yet laid up their *treasure in heaven*, as our Saviour expresseth it; they have not, as yet, so wholly devoted themselves to the service of God, as to make it their main business. When once they have done that, I dare assure them, they will find it so far from being a restraint upon them, or any ways disagreeable, to think of good things, that it will become very natural to them; and they will find the greatest pleasure in the world in so doing.

SECONDLY, Whoever would keep his heart always in a good frame, and be able to give a good account of his thoughts to God, must resolve to avoid two things, namely, idleness, and bad company; for both the one and the other strangely unhinge a man's mind, and disarm it of that severity, which is its best guard and defence against evil

evil thoughts, and make it become a prey to every temptation that shall attack it.

A WISE man should never be reduced to such a pass, as to say, I have nothing to do; I do not know how to spend my next hour; but should so order the course of his life, that all the portions of his time, as much as is possible, may be filled up with some useful, or at least, some innocent employment.

It is idleness, and having nothing to do, that is the mother of those unprofitable and sinful fancies, in which some men spend their days. And whereas temptations now and then come in the way of others; the idle man is forced to seek out temptations for the shipwreck of his virtue. And therefore 'tis no wonder, if he that seeks them, finds out too many of those abandoned associates.

AND indeed, loose and impertinent conversation, which was the other article I mentioned, tho' it looks with something a better grace, yet it is not much better than idleness. For wherever it is much used, it will so emasculate a man's mind, and take off the edge and vigour of it, as to serious things, that he cannot easily get it into a good frame again.—*Evil communication* (saith St. Paul) *corrupts good manners*. And therefore those people, a great part of whose life is taken up in gadding up and down;—in play, in merry-meetings, in telling or hearing idle stories, and the like; it is impossible but that their thoughts and inclinations, and the whole frame of their hearts should be of a piece, that is to say, very frothy, very light and foolish; not to say prophane, and wicked; nay atheistical too, if the company they much converse with be of that impious strain.

THIRDLY, Another thing of great moment for the keeping our hearts, is to be as attentive as

possible to the first motions of our minds ; and whenever we find that they tend towards something that is forbidden, to give them a check as soon as we can.

OFTENTIMES (as I observed before) we cannot prevent irregular desires, or passions, or inclinations from rising in our minds upon sundry occasions.

BUT this we can do: as soon as we are aware of them, we can refuse our consent to them ; (and in that case, I hope they will not be imputed to us as sins) nay, not only so, but we can hinder them from breaking out, or shewing themselves in our words or actions. For the motions of our outward members are all at our command, tho' the first operations of our minds be not.

HERE therefore will lie a main point in the art of well governing our minds and thoughts. You cannot, perhaps, for instance, prevent a sudden gust of anger from rising in your minds upon divers accidents ; but as you feel this passion, you can thus far stifle it, you can seal up your mouth, so that the passion shall not vent itself in unseemly words ; and if you will withdraw that fuel from the new-kindled fire, it will soon be extinguished and die: whereas, if you suffer it to break out into bitter speeches and expressions, it will flame beyond measure.

THUS again, if any indecent, impure imaginations, or desires, should be excited in you upon any occasion, it was not, perhaps, in your power to keep them from coming into your minds: but it is in your power to withdraw from the temptation that caused them,—and to endeavour to direct your thoughts to some other object ; at least not to proceed one step in any outward action, towards the accomplishment of those desires. If you
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take this course, the perturbations of your mind will cease, and you will soon return to your ordinary frame of mind.

AND let me tell you this farther, that by your being thus careful to resist and smother the first beginnings of sin; you will not only preserve, in a great measure, the innocency of your minds under the present temptation; but you will also have this farther advantage, that by this means you will increase your power over your thoughts, against the next time that the temptation returns. Every check you give to the first motions of sin makes the next assault of them the less furious. And if you constantly use yourselves thus to guard and watch over your hearts, you will in time get such a command over them, that you will not be troubled with those numerous, irregular desires and passions, which heretofore, upon every slight occasion, used to be kindled in your breast. By this method you will strengthen your faculties, and enlarge your powers, and by degrees bring yourselves to that happy temper of soul, that, to make use of St. Paul's expression, *there will be no great war between the law of your members, and the law of your minds*; but the world and the flesh will be crucified to you, as you are to them.

BUT then, fourthly, that you may be capable not only of keeping bad thoughts out of your minds, but also of having a constant spring of good ones; there are some particular exercises very proper for this purpose to be recommended: such, I mean, as frequent converse, not only with discreet and pious persons, but good books, especially the Holy Scriptures, as also, meditation and recollection at proper times; and above all,

fervent and daily prayer to God, both morning, noon, and night.

It is not to be expressed how much each of these things contribute towards inspiring us with good thoughts and pious resolutions.

A SHORT maxim now and then, tho' but occasionally introduced in conversation, that tends to virtue and goodness, will supply us sometimes with subject-matter for good thoughts for a long time afterwards. What lasting impressions then do you imagine would be left upon our minds, did we but make it our constant practice every day, to read or hear some portion of the Sacred Scriptures, or some other religious treatises, with a view to reap some spiritual advantage from them?

BUT above all things, we must take care to be diligent and serious in our applications to the throne of grace; for it is hearty prayer and unaffected piety, that will prove the most effectual means, after all, to keep our hearts steady to that which is good, and secure them from the pollutions of those sensible, earthly objects that surround us.

O! THEREFORE, let us be constant and unwearied in our exercises of true devotion. Nay, let us embrace every opportunity that offers us of raising our minds to God, and thanking him for his infinite love and goodness to us; and imploring the continual influences of his divine grace and holy spirit, and reinforcing our vows and purposes of perseverance in his service.

By this means we shall come to lead spiritual lives indeed. Our souls will be one perpetual fountain of good thoughts; and whilst we live here, our conversation will be in heaven: for God and Christ, and the things above will possess our hearts

hearts, tho' our habitations, indeed, are here below.

BUT then, in the fifth and last place, notwithstanding what I have hitherto said concerning the diligence with which we are to keep our hearts; yet this is always to be remembered, that we must be very careful to join discretion with it.

MY meaning is this, we must have a care not to be over-righteous, not to bend our thoughts immoderately, and more than our constitutions will bear, even to the best things; but we must so keep our hearts, as, at the same time, to preserve our healths, and keep up the vigour of our minds.

AND in order to be successful therein, we must not put them too much, or too long upon the stretch at one time, but relax them when there is occasion, and let them run out, and entertain themselves upon any thing that comes next to hand, provided it be innocent and inoffensive.

It is a vain thing to imagine, that we can be always thinking of our great and principal concerns, or that we can be always praying, or reading, or meditating; or, that, as our condition is in this world, even the greatest part of our thoughts should be such as we call religious and devout.

God hath provided a multiplicity of other business for the employment of our minds, so long as we live in this world. And by minding our avocations diligently and conscientiously, we serve God as acceptably, as if all our whole time was spent in acts of devotion.

NAY, even when we have no urgent business upon our hands, to take up our minds, it is not absolutely necessary, that we should be always thinking of religion. Nor would I call every thought a vain, an idle, or a sinful thought,
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that hath not God, or our spiritual concernments for its object. Even the most heavenly-minded amongst us, must sometimes be content to be entertained with such thoughts as our company, or our temper, or the present circumstances we are in, suggest to us. And provided those thoughts be but innocent, and no ways intrench upon the laws of piety, purity, or charity, be they otherwise ever so trifling or impertinent; I would not, I say, look upon them as ill thoughts, nor have any one displeased at himself upon account of them.

THE truth of it is, so long as we consist of bodies and souls, we cannot always be thinking of serious things. Those, indeed, are the wisest, who think of them most; but it is even dangerous to think of them always. For as most mens constitutions are, that is the ready way to spoil the habit of our bodies, and by that means render our minds perfectly unfit for thinking at all to any good purposes.

THUS have I laid before you the principal things, wherein, according to my humble opinion, the right government of our thoughts doth consist. And I doubt not, they are so safe, and so effectual, that whosoever will sincerely practise them, as far as he is able, will not only be easy and contented in this life, but be everlastingly happy in that which is to come.

SUNDAY



SUNDAY XIV.

* * A Summary of the whole Duty of Man.

ECCLESIASTES XII, 13.

Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.



BEFORE I enter upon the subject-matter of the admonition in the text, and the importance of it, I think it may not be amiss to give you a general character of the Preacher, from whose mouth the precept came; in order to enhance the value of it, and engage you to give ear to it with that serious attention, which it most justly deserves.

THE author then of this short, but comprehensive lesson of instruction, was no less a person than king *Solomon* himself, whose wisdom was so universal,

versal, that we are told, *there never was the like before him, nor ever shall be after him*: and he it was, I say, or rather, indeed, Wisdom itself, which, by the mouth of that royal and experienced Preacher, has contracted the whole duty of man within so narrow a compass, and laid down this unerring rule for the regulation of his conduct.

It will be highly requisite, however, to make this one observation by the way, that tho' the exhortation was, doubtless, intended for the spiritual improvement of mankind in general; yet it was the particular charge of a fond and indulgent parent to his dearly beloved son; from whence it may very reasonably be concluded, that the advice was the best, and most wholesome that could possibly be given; and that it would be an infinite advantage to him in particular, to attend heedfully thereto, and follow it, without the least deviation, all the days of his life. And 'tis highly reasonable to suppose likewise, that he intended it should carry a greater weight with it, and make a deeper impression in his mind than ordinary; since, after he had been expatiating for some considerable time on the folly of worldly wisdom, and the uncertainty of all sublunary enjoyments, he proceeds in the following most pathetic and affectionate manner; my son, says he, be admonished, and hear the conclusion of the whole matter. *Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*

In discoursing, therefore, on these words, I shall shew,

- I. THE full scope and purport of the injunction; and wherein the wisdom of fearing God principally consists.

II. I



II. I shall endeavour to prove, that he who is so wise, as to fear God in sincerity and truth, will find it no difficult task to keep his commandments.

III. THAT he, who has not the fear of God before his eyes, tho' he be ever so wise in the opinion of the world, is no better than a Fool. And, lastly,

I SHALL close my discourse with a word or two of exhortation.

* IN the first place then, I am to shew you what a truly religious fear of God is, and wherein the wisdom of it principally consists.

THIS reverential fear of God is an holy affection, or gracious habit, wrought in the soul by God, whereby it is not only inclined, but enabled, to obey all his commandments. *I will put my fear into the hearts of my people,* says God himself, by the Prophet *Jeremiab, that they shall not depart from me.* The fear of God comprehends our whole duty to him, if we fear the Lord in an acceptable manner, and as we ought to do; if we entertain the same reverential awe of him, as a dutiful son does of his father, we shall love him most affectionately, and chearfully obey even the most difficult of all his commandments. Nay, this fear of the Lord extends itself still farther, and comprehends in it, not only our love for God, but our duty likewise to all our fellow-creatures; to whom we are obliged to perform all the good offices within our power, out of a principle of conscience, and in obedience to that God, whose commandments we profess to obey. Of this fear of God then, it may be said, as our Blessed Saviour himself does of the love

love of God, that *it is the first and great commandment*; which, if we take but due care to keep, according to its true and comprehensive meaning, we may depend upon it, that we shall perform our duty aright, in every branch of it, and live void of offence towards God and towards man.

I COME now, in the next place, to make it plainly appear to you, that he who is so wise, as sincerely to fear God, will find it no difficult task to keep his commandments.

THERE are too many, it must be confessed, who entertain such frightful ideas of religion, that they insist, the precepts of it are impossible to be put in practice as they ought; and therefore too rashly determining, that the attempt is fruitless, will give themselves no manner of trouble about it: others again, somewhat more considerate, will allow the possibility of their being complied with; but imagine, they are impositions extremely rigorous, and such restraints upon human nature as are highly unreasonable; and that the man who is determined to be strictly governed by them, must lead the life of a perfect Solitary, and indulge himself in none of those common gratifications which seem, by the frame and constitution of things, to be perfectly innocent, and allowed to all mankind.

AND being thus prejudiced and prepossessed, they look on themselves as no ways blame-worthy, in making no profession of religion at all: or in case they do, they think they may indulge themselves in such liberties as are altogether inconsistent with it.

Now, that such gloomy apprehensions of a strictly religious life are absolutely groundless, and that the commandments which God Almighty expects we should keep, are so far from being an insupportable

insupportable burden, that they are just the reverse, will plainly appear from the whole tenour of the Sacred Scriptures. Our Blessed Saviour himself has assured us,—*that his yoke is easy, and his burden light.*—And several of his Apostles, but the Evangelist St. *John*, in particular, declares to all the world, *that the commandments of Christ are no ways grievous.*

It must be allowed, that there is a seeming severity in being obliged to forgive our enemies, and doing good to those who spitefully use us; in renouncing all we hold most dear to us, when it is required of us by God for the sake of his dearly beloved Son; yet these precepts, hard as they may be accounted, are so far from being impossibilities, that thousands have actually practised these heroic virtues, upon much lighter considerations, than those which the christian religion proposeth to us, for the performance of them. And if these are not impracticable, why should the compliance with the rest of the christian precepts, which are much easier, be deemed an insupportable burden? No one can presume to say, that any of God's commandments are so grievous, but what he may, if he be but religiously inclined, yield obedience to with pleasure; for the laws of God, notwithstanding all the plausible objections that may be started against religion, require no more of any man, than what he can do with ease, if he pleases; and whoever does his honest endeavours to serve God, in the best manner he is able, tho' frailties and infirmities may accompany his best services; yet we may venture to assert, that he keeps the commandments of God, in such a manner, as will be acceptable in his sight.

I SHALL now proceed to the third article proposed, namely, to demonstrate, that he who has
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not the fear of God before his eyes, tho' he be ever so wise in the opinion of the world, is no better than a Fool.

AND this is a truth which I shall chuse to illustrate by Examples, as they are apt to dwell on the memory longest, and make the deepest impressions on the mind.

AND tho' many might with ease be produced out of the Sacred Scriptures; yet I shall content myself with producing only one from the *New Testament*, and two from the *Old*, as being more than sufficient to answer the end proposed.

THE first instance then shall be the *rich man*, recorded in the twelfth chapter of the *Gospel* according to St. *Luke*, who by all worldly-minded men must be allowed to be a wise man; one, who understood perfectly well all the secret arts and methods of gain, arising from every branch of trade and commerce; and moreover, it may reasonably be presumed, that he was an excellent oeconomist likewise, from the vast improvements that he made to his estate, and from the enlargement of his barns: and to all this it may still farther be added to his praise, as a reputed wise man, that he was no miser, who heaps up immense treasures with no other intent than to lock them up, and in secret adore them; but one of a generous spirit, one resolutely bent to enjoy those good things, which he had laid up in store as the happy effects of his industry and knowledge of the world; and yet, after all this seemingly prudent forecast, how emphatically is this wealthy merchant pronounced an egregious fool, by our Saviour himself, who was not addicted to make use of such harsh terms, upon his unexpected summons from the Almighty! *Thou Fool* (says he) *this night shall*
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thy soul be required of thee; and then whose shall those things be that thou hast provided?

THE next instance I shall produce is that of *Ahitophel*, the *Gilonite*. This wise privy-counsellor, not only of King *David*, but of his son *Absalom* afterwards, was looked upon as a man of such a deep penetration, and such a peculiar insight into the most intricate affairs of state, that he was by both consulted upon all emergent occasions;—and the counsel, we are told, in the 16th chapter of the second book of *Samuel*, verse the twenty-third, *which he counselled in those days was, as if a man had enquired at the Oracle of God*; and notwithstanding all the sagacity, all the forecast of this distinguished statesman; yet we find, upon his counsel's being overthrown by *Hushai's* superior advice, according to God's appointment, as we read in the 17th chapter of the same book, he gave the most manifest proof of his being a haughty and imperious Fool, that he could possibly give; for, in the height of his resentment (being unable to bear the indignity offered to his judgment, and the preference given to one, whom he looked upon with an eye of contempt, as being, in his own opinion, infinitely his superior) *he saddled his ass, and arose, and got him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself*;—by which monstrously foolish, infamous, and unmanly action, he at once excluded himself, not only from all the enjoyments of this life, but from all reasonable hopes of the mercy and favour of the Almighty in that which is to come.

THO' these two remarkable examples may be thought sufficient, I shall venture to add that of the Royal Preacher himself, as still more extraordinary. How low did this superlatively wise, this venerable and experienced prince, whose cha-

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rafter has already been drawn, sink in the esteem of the world, when he had cast that fear of God behind his back, which was the only true wisdom! His heart, we are told, clave unto strange women; he had seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines; and forasmuch as the generality of them were worshippers of idols, so uxorious, so very fond was this aged and royal dolt, that he joined in their ridiculous and absurd forms of public adoration. And here, I think, we may justly ask the question; could any man, how weak soever in his intellectuals, demonstrate himself to be a greater Fool, and a libertine, than this *Solomon*, this abandoned *Solomon*, who before had been so renowned for his wisdom? And with how much justice does he take for his motto, in this book of the *Ecclesiastes*, which, 'tis generally agreed, that he penned by inspiration, some time after he had truly repented of his sin and folly, and was recovered from his most shameful infatuation; *vanity of vanities*, says he, *all is vanity*,—but the fear of the Lord, and the observance of his statutes!

AND now to conclude, let me exhort you all, with the utmost earnestness, to yield an implicit obedience to all God's commandments; let us all take delight in the law of the Lord, and ponder on it night and day, which is the only sure guide to direct our affections to him, and the only infallible testimony that our fear of him is filial and sincere. And that awful reverence, fear and love of him, will, we shall find, daily encrease and improve, by our paying a strict regard to all his precepts; by making it our whole study and concern to depart from evil, that is, in other terms, to do nothing that may any ways displease him. That reverential fear of him will cause us
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to taste and see how good and gracious the Lord is, by making us more and more like unto himself. And when we shall feel the happy effects of his goodness towards us, by our obedience, and doing that good which he commands us, new beams of love will every day break in upon our spirits, and engage our affections in such a manner, that our imperfect fear or love of God in this world shall receive perfection in that which is to come; and our exercise upon earth become our recompence and reward in heaven; where not only vice and sin, but where even the inferior virtues and graces shall find no admittance. They shall fail, cease and vanish; love only shall enter there, and dwell and reign in the full and uninterrupted enjoyments of the dear object it is so happily fixed on for ever and ever.

If we be wise, therefore, if this fear or love of God should not be sufficiently as yet rooted in our hearts; let us labour without ceasing to acquire that greatest of blessings; and if we have it, let us practise it to the praise of God, the good of our fellow-creatures, and our own comfort and consolation. Which that we may effectually perform, God of his infinite mercy vouchsafe, by his grace, thro' our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom, be all glory and thanksgiving for ever and ever. *Amen.*



SUNDAY XV.

The Duty of setting a good Example
to our Neighbours.

MATTHEW V, 16.

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may
see your good works, and glorify your father
which is in heaven.*



Since the words of the text are obvious and intelligible, it would be time very unprofitably spent to expatiate on their metaphorical signification.—I imagine, therefore, that I have little else at present to do, but to point out to you some peculiar shining virtues, some amiable instances of unaffected piety and sanctity of manners, the imitation whereof will doubtless contribute largely,

ly, not only to the temporal peace and tranquillity of mankind in general here, but to their endless felicity hereafter. But before I enter upon the subject-matter of my intended discourse, I think it a duty incumbent on me to remove one very natural objection, to which the precept here laid down is openly exposed; I mean, the seemingly direct contradiction, that this rule of life is to the positive injunctions of our Blessed Saviour, in the very beginning of the subsequent chapter. For there we are strictly charged to take heed, that we do not our alms before men to be seen of them; and in the same chapter, we are commanded, when we pray, not to be as the hypocrites are, who love to stand praying in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men; but to enter into our closets, and shut the door, and to pray to our father in secret:—and in another place, he condemns the hypocrites, who when they fast, are of a sad countenance, that they may appear unto men to fast; and commands his disciples to put on the same look that they have at other times, that they appear not unto men to fast, but unto their father which is in secret.

Now, it may very naturally be asked, how are these seemingly contradictory precepts to be reconciled?—How can we let our light shine in so public a manner as here prescribed, and yet conceal our good works from the eye of the world, as we are there directed? But this difficulty will, I presume, be fully and satisfactorily removed, and these texts easily reconciled, if we will but give ourselves time, in the first place, to reflect—That what our Saviour there condemns in the Pharisees, and forbids in his disciples, was not their open and visible practice of such acts of virtue and religion,

as were of a public nature, but their publishing and proclaiming such only as ought to have been kept secret; for he does not blame them for praying publickly in the temple, at the stated hours of divine worship; but only for putting up their private petitions to the Almighty in places of publick resort, in the corners of the streets, when they would be far more acceptable to him in some more retired place.—Neither does he condemn them for appearing to fast on such days as were appointed by the church for that purpose, but only for proclaiming such fasts, as were purely voluntary, and of their own direction.

Now these are clearly distinct things, and both highly praise-worthy in their proper seasons: for it is sometimes requisite, that we should bestow our alms publickly, that we may thereby set a good example of charity to others; at all other times, indeed, we should give our alms privately, to approve our sincerity to God only, and our own consciences.—It is an indispensable duty incumbent on us, at stated times, to pray publickly in the church, the place set apart for divine worship, and in the assemblies of the righteous; thereby to acknowledge publickly our whole dependance upon God, to confess his name before men, and by our united prayers to obtain mercy at his hands.—But when our confessions or petitions more peculiarly relate to ourselves, then a closet, with the door shut, is a more proper place than the corner of a street, or than even the temple itself.—And thus also it is necessary sometimes, namely, on days appointed for solemn fasting, to fast publickly, and to appear to do so; and at other times, to keep private fasts, between God and ourselves, and let the world know nothing of them. These duties

duties therefore being clearly distinct, and both, not only necessary, but commendable in their respective seasons, the text, which commands the publick, and those other places in the next chapter, which command the private exercises of religion, are no ways inconsistent with, or repugnant to each other.

It may be further considered, that the grounds and reasons, for which our Saviour here in the text commands the publick exercise of religion and virtue, and for which hypocrites make a publick shew of more religion and virtue than they really are possessed of, are widely different.—For the latter, when at any time they gave an alms, would sound a trumpet to give publick notice of it, and would call together a concourse of people to see their donations, when of any considerable value; and when they prayed, they purposely chose such places for their acts of devotion, as were most in view; and whenever they fasted, they took care, by disfiguring their faces, to acquaint the world with their acts of penitence and mortification.—And what were the motives that induced them thereto?—Why, our Saviour tells us, that they did all this, with no other view, than, that they might have glory of men:—their chief, if not their only end, was to gain the praise and applause of the spectators, and to advance their worldly interests, by such publick acts of seeming piety. And we also are plainly commanded in the text, *to let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works*;—but not to the intent that we ourselves may gain honour and reputation thereby; not that we may have the glory of men, but the approbation of him who knows the secrets of our hearts; for, if popular applause was in rea-

lity our only or ultimate end, that would also be our sole reward.—But in letting our light so shine before men, we are to have much nobler and more extensive views; we are not to do it as the Pharisees did, out of ostentation, and to procure respect, but for the direction and guidance of others by our example:—what we are ultimately to aim at, is not that we ourselves may have glory of men, but that God may be glorified in us;—that men seeing our good works, may glorify our father which is in heaven.

AND this makes a very manifest and wide difference between the practice, which our Saviour here commands, and that which, in the next chapter, he censures and condemns. The actions are indeed, to outward appearance the same, but the ends diametrically opposite.—The hypocrite does his works, that they may be seen of men; with no further view but to gain praise and applause to himself; God is not in all his thoughts.—The good christian likewise so does his works, that they may be seen of men, but not with any self-interested view;—he does his works, because God has commanded them, and he does all the same good works at other times, when he knows he is seen by no one but God himself:—and when he chuses to do them in the sight of the world, as judging it most proper so to do; yet even then, 'tis only that other men may, by his example, be taught and encouraged to tread in his steps, and that God alone may be glorified thereby.

HAVING removed this objection, give me leave to observe, that there are some christian virtues which have a peculiar beauty and comeliness, which approve themselves to every man's conscience, and which, as being amiable, even at the first sight,

sight, and universally praised, and spoken well of, have a peculiar aptness to beget a liking and esteem, and a kind of favour and affection for that religion which enjoins the practice of them; it is evidently a duty incumbent on us, and a duty, which the precept in the text principally intended to lay upon us, to have throughout the whole course of our lives, a peculiar regard to these virtues, and a special care not to be deficient therein:—and of this kind, amongst many more, are these four which follow, namely, *Temperance*,—*Justice*,—*Meekness*,—and *Charity*,—on each of which I propose to speak briefly in their order.—And first, *Temperance*.—This is not only a necessary duty of christianity, but a very graceful and ornamental virtue;—it renders the person that is endued with it, the universal object of reverence and respect.—For a man that eats and drinks with moderation, out of pure necessity, to answer the calls of nature, and not to gratify an inordinate appetite, lives as becomes a man, and maintains that dignity and dominion, which the rational part of him, his soul, ought to have over him.—Hence, when we would give a friend a good character in a few words,—we say he is a sober man;—and in that comprehensive form, we imagine, that we give him a sufficient recommendation.—For, if he truly answers to that character,—he is one who has his thoughts about him, and is governed by his reason; he is one therefore worthy of being employed in any business, whereof he is capable, and will most assuredly answer the warmest expectations of those who encourage him:—whereas an intemperate person, who is a slave to his appetite, and drowns his reason in wine, converts the man
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of sense into a fool,—and the weak man into a brute ; and renders himself therefore more odious and contemptible than any other idiot or brute whatever ; because his folly, or want of reason is the effect of his own vicious choice, whereas theirs was the lot of their creation.

SUCH is the natural turpitude of the sin of intemperance in general, that even they, who too freely indulge themselves in all manner of riots and licentiousness, cannot but be sensible, that their course of life is a reproach and a discredit to them ; for which reason, unless they are abandoned wretches indeed, and past all manner of shame, they seldom care that the world should be acquainted with their irregular proceedings.—Such as are addicted to the sin of drunkenness, will, as the Apostle says, be drunken in the night, and if upon any occasion a character were to be given of them, they would take it heinously of any one, who should make, tho' ever so justly, their inordinate love of wine a part of it.

A PART of their character, however, it must be, if it be matter of fact ; because 'tis what, with all their care, they cannot conceal from the eye of the world ; for the natural effects of their intemperance will, in spite of themselves, be conspicuous to every beholder :—that sottishness, that stupidity, that folly and childish deportment, which they must needs be guilty of, too evidently discover the source from whence they flow ; so that how close and secret soever the man might be in the first act of intemperance, it becomes, nevertheless, as publick, as if it had been acted in all the streets thro' which he afterwards passes ; or in all those companies, in which he afterwards happens to be admitted ;

admitted; for his downcast look, his irregular gait, his trembling hand, his antick postures, his faultering tongue, his prophane or foolish discourse; every word, in short, that he utters, every tale that he relates, and every thing he does, too evidently demonstrates how shamefully he has employed his time: so that a man cannot be intemperate, especially in drinking, but he must be scandalously so; and what is commonly said of him, unless he be one that is ill-natured and apt, at those times, to quarrel, that he is no one's foe but his own, is most evidently false; for he hurts every body that knows him, or converses with him; at least, there is great danger, that they may be infected by his ill example; and what is still worse, if he be a member of any christian community whatsoever, he brings a reproach and disparagement upon that holy religion which he pretends to profess.

ANOTHER very graceful and ornamental virtue, the practice whereof is apt to render a man beloved and respected by all those amongst whom he lives, and by consequence to beget also in others a favourable opinion of, and a high esteem for, that religion, by which he is influenced and governed,—is *Justice*, exact justice and honesty in all his dealings, and a faithful discharge of that trust, whatever it be, that is reposed in him.—And therefore, in the place, where christian servants are exhorted to grace their profession, this way of their doing it is particularly mentioned.—*Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*——In order, therefore, to the obtaining that end, which, in the text, all christians are required to aim

aim at, that is, that we may gain glory to God, by making the light of our example to shine before men, there is plainly nothing more needful than this, that we be exact in all our dealings, punctual in the performance of all our promises, and faithful in the execution of all our trusts.—

For whatever opinion or persuasion men are of, in the speculative point of religion, justice and truth, fidelity and fair-dealing, are virtues which all people approve of, and commend at least in others; and tho' they, who for filthy lucre's sake, will indulge themselves in the practice of all manner of fraud and delusion, may find their injustice tend to their private emolument; yet they cannot think it reputable, neither can they justify their iniquitous proceedings with a good grace.—What they principally trust to is their artifice and dissimulation, whereby they hope they may so contrive their illegal practices, as not to be discovered; but, if their evil deeds should ever be brought to light, they are conscious to themselves that such a discovery would unavoidably cover them with shame and confusion of face.

ANOTHER christian grace or virtue, highly ornamental to all such as are endued with it, is *Meekness* or *Humility*, together with all the various branches and expressions, all the fruits and effects thereof; every one of which is amiable and engaging, and has a natural tendency to render beloved and respected, the person in whom they are discerned;—such are sweetness of temper, easiness of access, affability in discourse, and a courteous deportment; a readiness to do every good office in their power, and a perfect acquiescence in the dispensations of divine providence, let their station
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in this life, be what it will.—All these several branches and fruits of humility are qualities of a very endearing nature, and never fail of procuring the love and esteem of all mankind; they are all of general good report, and all praise-worthy; so that there can be nothing more proper to recommend our most holy religion to those who are strangers to it, than the constant and conscientious practice and exercise of them:—for even they, who know nothing of the grounds and principles of our religion, cannot but see and acknowledge, that it is a religion, worthy of the Supreme Being, when they observe how much such graces adorn and beautify the lives of those who are influenced by them; when they take notice how orderly and useful it makes them in every state and condition of life, be it what it will;—and doubtless such a general approbation of our religion, such a happy prejudice and prepossession in its favour, cannot but contribute greatly towards their future conviction, and an earnest desire of becoming proselytes to the christian faith.

ANOTHER virtue or grace, in the exercise whereof, it is our duty to be very constant and exemplary, thereby to procure the love and esteem of all mankind, and by consequence a very favourable opinion of our most holy religion, is *Charity*, as that term includes all the offices of kindness and compassion; all the acts and expressions of bounty and benevolence towards our fellow-creatures. The diligent practice of all virtues of this kind is so manifestly comprehended in this general precept; *Let your light so shine before men, &c.* that our church, in the offertory of the communion service, has placed this text amongst those
other

other portions of Holy Scripture, whereby she means to exhort her communicants to acts of charity, and to a tender regard for the distressed; as if she thought the principal intention of it was, that we should abound in such good works, and thereby glorify God, and reflect an honour on our most holy religion.

AND tho' this was not the only thing here meant, yet most undoubtedly it is a considerable part, and a main ingredient of the general duty hereby enjoined; there being no other duty of christianity that adorns our profession so much as this; no other grace or virtue that has such a powerful tendency to recommend our holy religion to the esteem and practice of those, who are yet aliens to it, as that diffusive beneficence, that unlimited charity, which is inculcated by it, and carefully practised by all the sincere professors of it.—*For by this, says our Saviour, shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.*

BEFORE I conclude, I shall urge some few motives to the practice of the duty here enjoined; and to avoid tediousness, shall lay before you no other than those suggested in the words of the text;—*That they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven.*—As if it had been said;—if you are careful to make your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, that they will so clearly discern the beauty of holiness and virtue, thro' your example, as to be in love with it, and by that means be inticed to imitate and resemble you therein; the blessed consequence of which will be, that God will be glorified in their conversion here, and their salvation

tion hereafter.—The natural tendency of good example, to provoke others to good works, and the great probability there is, that it will have this effect upon some, at least, if not upon all that see it, is indeed a very powerful motive to the discharge of the duty here enjoined; because, if it has this effect, we shall, by thus letting our light shine before men, bring the greatest glory to God, do the greatest act of generosity to our neighbour, and obtain for ourselves the most ample reward. I say, we shall thereby bring the greatest glory to God: for, if we can, by our good example, be a means of converting those who see our good works, from a course of sin, to a life of righteousness, the consequence of that will be,—that God will be glorified by their conversion; they, upon whom this blessed change shall be wrought, will have great cause to magnify and praise the name of the Lord for his loving-kindness to them.—That he will be glorified in their lives, which they will from thenceforth dedicate to, and spend wholly in his service:—*and herein, says our Saviour, is my father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.*—And lastly, that he will also be glorified in their salvation, when being pardoned and justified, and admitted into his glorious presence, they shall spend their whole eternity in singing forth his praises.

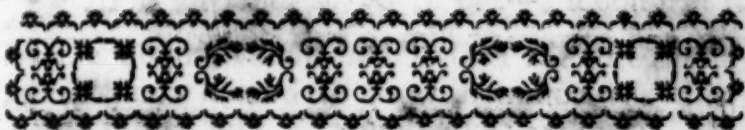
If our good example shall have this blessed effect upon others;—if it shall provoke and stir them up to the same good works; we shall thereby do them the greatest service in our power.—We reckon it a very generous action, and so indeed it is, to rescue and redeem a man from any bodily pain or danger; but it must needs be a much greater, to preserve his soul from eternal destruction;

tion; and this is what we shall happily accomplish, if, by the light of our example, we instruct our neighbour;—and if, by the influence of it, we incite and encourage him to well-doing.

Let therefore your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven.



SUNDAY



SUNDAY XVI.

* * On the Excellency of the sacred
* Scriptures.

JOHN V. 39.

*Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye
have eternal life; and they are they which
testify of me.*



HERE are a set of men in this degenerate and profligate age, who are so very wise in their own conceits, and such strenuous advocates for reason, that, tho', 'tis true, they were baptized in the christian faith, and from their infancy trained up in the profession of it; yet they not only privately in their hearts, but in public conversation (to their shame and confusion be it spoken) seem proud of opposing
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it, and make no scruple to depreciate, at once, the whole authority of revelation, and impiously set those sacred volumes, which were written by men, inspired by the Holy-Ghost himself, upon a level with any common work of human composition. He, however, who, upon the most serious reflection, is fully convinced, that there is a Supreme Being, who is infinitely good, omnipotent, and just; the great creator of the universe, and the all-wise disposer of all things in it; he, who firmly believes, that there will be a future state after death, wherein the whole race of mankind shall receive an everlasting allotment of reward or punishment, according to their good or evil deeds done in the flesh; such a man cannot, doubtless, but think himself indispensably obliged to ingratiate himself, as far as he is able, with that Sovereign Power, by rendering his conduct as agreeable as possible to his divine will; cannot but find himself concerned to discover, with the utmost attention, what actions are most likely to recommend him to his favour and protection on the one hand; and, with the greatest care imaginable, to avoid the commission of such things as he is conscious to himself will give offence, and render him the object of the Almighty's high displeasure on the other.

How precarious, how dark a progress we could possibly have made into such important enquiries, by the dint of natural reason only, notwithstanding all its boasted sufficiency, we may form a just judgment from the erroneous tenets, and superstitious practices of the most enlightened heathens. By their misconduct, we may plainly discern, if we are not wanting in ourselves, how unable man is, without some better guide than his reason only, to trace out the lines of his duty towards God,
and

and to prescribe to himself such rules as are capable of rendering his best services acceptable in his sight. What absurd ideas did these idolatrous people entertain of him, and how ridiculous; nay, I may say, how impious was their manner of paying him their tribute of divine adoration! It must be acknowledged, indeed, that there were some few extraordinary men of penetration among them, who carried their researches beyond the common ignorance of the vulgar, and made shift, with infinite pains and study, to retrieve, for their own private direction, a tolerable system of morality; but then that system was far from being perfect and complete, and at best confined to a very scanty number of men of extraordinary speculation; whereas the generality of mankind, who had neither opportunities, nor, indeed, capacities for such intricate and abstruse researches, were carried down the current of popular superstition, without any other rules for their direction, than either their own natural affections, or the prevailing modes of the country, whereof they were either natives, or wherein they were respectively trained up, prescribed to them. How inestimable a blessing therefore must it be to every true and sincere Christian to have not only the same light of reason to direct him, as the Gentiles had, or the wisest of our modern free-thinkers now have; but the additional revelation of the divine will, those sacred volumes of the inspired penmen, for his more secure guidance! A guidance so infallible, in short, as to suit every occasion, and so obvious and easy even to the weakest understanding, that he may run who reads it; and he who will be governed by the wholesome precepts therein laid down for his faith and practice, may justly think, or in other terms, may have all the just grounds ima-

ginable to conclude, that eternal life will be the happy consequence, and the glorious reward of his yielding a strict obedience to them.

IN discoursing therefore on this short, but comprehensive admonition of our Saviour, I shall shew,

I. FIRST, the indispensable obligations we lie under, to make the study of the sacred Scriptures our principal care and concern.

II. SECONDLY, I shall endeavour to demonstrate, that no persons, how illiterate, or how young soever they may be, should be denied the privilege of searching those sacred Writings, those invaluable treasures of true wisdom, notwithstanding the use of them is prohibited by the Church of *Rome* to the vulgar, under the weak and frivolous pretence of their being liable, thro' their ignorance, to wrest the true and genuine sense of them to their own destruction.

III. THIRDLY, I shall lay before you the important advantages that will most assuredly arise from an unwearied and assiduous application to this most excellent study. And

IV. FOURTHLY and lastly, I shall prescribe some few general rules, out of the many that might be produced, by the due observance whereof, we may read and examine both the *Old* and *New Testament* throughout, with understanding, pleasure, and profit.

AND, in the first place, we are indispensably obliged to apply ourselves, with the utmost care
and

attention, to the study of the sacred Scriptures, as they are the invaluable compositions of such men as were under the immediate inspiration of the Holy-Ghost.

SINCE our reason dictates to us, as we have before observed, that there is a God, the great creator, and all-wise disposer of the world, 'tis a concern of the last importance, in regard to our everlasting happiness, that we take all the care, we are capable of, to do every thing we imagine may be acceptable in his sight; and with equal precaution, to avoid the commission of such actions, as we are conscious to ourselves may have a natural tendency to provoke and offend him.

To this we may add, that forasmuch as the Almighty, by right of creation, has an indisputable title to our obedience; 'tis not only our interest, but a duty incumbent upon us, to do nothing but what is consistent with his good will and pleasure. And forasmuch as it is actually impossible for us so to deport ourselves, as may be acceptable in the sight of God, if we are perfect strangers to the laws and statutes which he has prescribed; it necessarily follows, that 'tis an essential branch of our duty to enquire, without delay, into those particulars, wherein he peremptorily expects our implicit obedience.

So natural are these deductions, that there is no religion ever made its appearance yet in the world, but what has been grounded on these principles, and have been recommended to the practice of mankind, from the authority, either of a real or pretended revelation.

SINCE then the Almighty was pleased to communicate his will to our forefathers, by the Prophets, as we find recorded in the *Old Testament*, and has fully revealed his Son to us, in the Go-

spels, by his Holy Evangelists, and has peremptorily insisted on our obedience to all the precepts contained therein, and in the Writings of his Apostles, contained in the *New Testament*; and has moreover passed sentence of damnation upon every person, who shall presume to neglect and despise them; it becomes our bounden duty implicitly to obey all his injunctions, and by consequence, to make ourselves acquainted, without the least reservation, with the true import and extent of those two distinct revelations. If the Heathens, who had no other guide than the light of nature to direct them in the knowledge and will of God, were looked upon as inexcusable, in not attending with the utmost diligence and closest application, to the dictates of that, comparatively speaking, dim light; how much more justly blame-worthy shall we be, who have both reason and revelation for our infallible guides? What hopes can we conceive of escaping, if we turn a deaf ear to such admonitions, and are careless and remiss in the improvement of so much greater means of salvation?

IN vain has the Almighty himself spoken to us by the mouths of his servant *Moses*, and the rest of the Prophets; in vain has he sent his only begotten Son into the world, to declare his will and pleasure, and to demand our most serious attention; in vain has his Son sent out his Evangelists and Apostles to the remotest corners of the earth for the propagation of his Gospel; in vain have they preached in obedience to their divine mission; in vain, in short, has the good providence of God preserved and transmitted down to the Christian Church, those sacred Oracles, those inestimable treasures of true wisdom, if men should at last be left at their own option, either to give their attention

tion to them, or reject them, just as their wayward fancies should direct them.

THO' God Almighty may, it is true, if he sees fitting, make known his will to us, by an immediate revelation, without referring us to those sacred Oracles; yet since he has given us in writing such a perfect and compleat system of all those truths, which he expects we should believe, as well as all those duties, which he requires us to practise; it would be a monstrous act of presumption in any man to expect, that God should convey that knowledge to him by a miracle, which he is capable of attaining by an assiduous application only to this most excellent study.

It must be acknowledged, indeed, that notwithstanding every private Christian ought to search the Scriptures, as we have above, we hope, sufficiently shewn; yet the duty is not so absolutely incumbent on some men, as 'tis on others.

THERE are a large body of men, who are set apart for that particular service, and by their entering into holy Orders, have professedly devoted their whole lives to this most excellent study. These men, 'tis true, ought to be more mighty in the Scriptures, that is, more conversant with them than the generality of Christians are, and to be thoroughly qualified to instruct the unlearned in those sacred Writings, where any difficulty occurs to them, which they cannot easily comprehend; yet the establishment of that sacred Order was never intended to excuse the negligence of any lay-christian, or render his application to the study of the Scriptures altogether needless. 'Tis the duty indeed, as well as the employment, of every minister, to aid and assist the weaknesses of his parishioners, to supply their want of abilities, and to encourage them, as much as possible, to be assiduous

duous in so delightful, as well as so important, a study. Every layman, I say, how illiterate soever he may be, as by the Sacrament of Baptism, he has been admitted a member of the Christian Church, is in duty bound to set God's holy Word before his eyes, as an infallible guide to his future felicity, and to search the holy Scriptures, more especially those particular parts thereof, where the true import and meaning of them are plain and obvious to the weakest understanding, for the rules of his conduct, and for applying that knowledge he procures from those treasures of wisdom, not only to his own private emolument, but to the edification likewise of his fellow-creatures.

WHEN God Almighty condescended so far as to prescribe a written law for the spiritual improvement of the house of *Israel*, and entrusted it to his servant *Moses*, to deliver it into the hands of his favourite people the *Jews*; tho' there was one tribe in particular belonging to that house, whose whole business and employment was to attend at the altar, and to pronounce openly, in the name of the Lord, their general benediction, after their publick instruction to the congregation; yet such as belonged not to that sacred tribe, were by no means excused on that account, nor in the least prohibited the study of God's most holy laws. The Almighty, who is all good and gracious, as well as all-wise, did not partially take away from any persons, how illiterate or young soever, the key of knowledge; the kingdom of heaven was laid open to all in general; and any one who was so seriously inclined, had a free and uninterrupted admittance.

“ HEAR, O *Israel*, (says the indulgent father of all mercies, the great God of heaven and earth, to his peculiar people) the words
 “ which

“ which I command thee this day, shall be in thy
 “ heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto
 “ thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou
 “ sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by
 “ the way, when thou liest down, and when thou
 “ risest up; and thou shalt bind them for a sign
 “ upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets
 “ between thine eyes, and thou shalt write them
 “ upon the posts of thy house, and upon thy
 “ Gates.” From whence ’tis evident, beyond all
 contradiction, that those sacred Writings were, at
 that time, to be as universally published, as any
 important affair whatsoever could possibly be.
 And in conformity to this express command of
 God the Father, we find God the Son, long after
 him, in his debate with the *Jews*, who were living
 at the time of his ministry in the flesh, for the
 generality appealing to the Writings of the inspired
 penmen of the *Old Testament*; and referring all
 such as flocked round him, to hear the new doc-
 trines which he advanced, to those Writings of
Moses and the Prophets, as holy books, which
 were in the hands almost of every *Jew*, and al-
 lowed to be the dictates of God himself, and with
 which every conscientious *Jew* was in duty bound
 to be well acquainted. And that the sacred Scrip-
 tures were allowed to be in the hands of every
 member of the *Jewish* Church, indiscriminately,
 may very fairly be inferred from what *St. Paul*
 says of *Timothy*, namely, *That he had studied the*
holy Scriptures from his very infancy. And ’tis plain,
 that the Apostle highly commended him for his
 assiduous application to them, when he was but
 a child. The inference to be drawn from thence
 can be nothing less than this, to wit, that in the
Jewish Church, at that that time, there was no
 prohibition from reading the Scriptures, no ex-
 clusion

clusion of any person whomsoever, man, woman or child, from searching into those invaluable treasures of wisdom; but on the contrary, all in general, without the least reservation, were not only permitted to search them; but were highly encouraged and applauded for their close application to that most excellent study.

AND as there was no such restraint ever laid upon the members of the *Jewish* Church; so 'tis evident likewise, that no such thing was ever intended to be imposed by the Gospel on the weakest member of the Church of Christ; and this will appear to be fact, beyond all contradiction, from the few following considerations.

AND first, 'tis very remarkable, that the Gospels, and, indeed, the Writings of all the other parts of the *New Testament*, were written in a language then universally read and understood, and not in the native language of those sacred penmen.

If then the Evangelists, or any others of those inspired writers had ever proposed to exclude any persons whomsoever from searching the Scriptures, they would, doubtless, have locked them up in some language, which they themselves, indeed, perfectly well understood, but was not so universally known. Had they been written in their own native tongue, 'tis true, they would have been understood well enough in *Judea*, and some few of the eastern countries; but then the knowledge of them would have been confined within a very narrow compass; and to the rest of the world, they would have been altogether unintelligible. But a very small number of persons would have taken the pains to make themselves masters of a foreign tongue, that had not the least affinity with their own; and but very few, had they inclination, would have had leisure time, or indeed capacities,

pacities, for such a laborious acquisition. We find, however, that the Evangelists and Apostles, who were indefatigable in their endeavours, to make as many profelytes to the christian faith as possibly they could, took peculiar care to indite their divine precepts in a language that was almost universally spoken; and as persons in low circumstances, and of still lower attainments, had precious and immortal souls to be saved, as well as those who were rich, and had all the advantages of a polite and liberal education; they likewise took care, that no person whomsoever should be debarred the liberty of searching the Scriptures as thoroughly as they thought fit, and applauded those whom they found inclined to make them their principal care and concern. And in order that those divine Oracles should be still more universally consulted, they were in a very short time after their first publication, translated into divers languages, so that every nation was furnished with copies thereof, and were capable of reading the wonderful works of the Lord in that language which was most familiar to them.

In the next place, it is observable, that had the Evangelists and Apostles intended to restrain any particular set of men from the perusal of their divine composures, they would have left behind them some express prohibition for that purpose: had the Christian Church been in reality in so much danger as the *Roman-Catholicks* would insinuate, the peculiar qualifications of such as should be entitled to the privilege of searching the Scriptures, had, doubtless, been peremptorily defined; and such as were not duly qualified, would most assuredly have been totally excluded, or at least discouraged from so perilous an attempt, by a friendly representation of that destruction which would have

have been the fatal consequence of their wresting and perverting the true and genuine sense of those Scriptures: so far, however, were those inspired penmen from dissuading their new converts from such a dangerous search; that the Evangelist St. *John*, in particular, recommends his Writings to the perusal of all Christians, without the least exception, for their spiritual improvement and growth in grace; and not to a few select disciples of his own, who had had greater experience and greater opportunities than the rest of their neighbours, of being instructed in the belief that *Jesus Christ* was the true Messiah, who was foretold by the Prophets; and that dearly beloved Son of God, who was acknowledged to be such by a voice from heaven at his publick Baptism, as recorded in the Gospels; and of being assured, by their faith in that Saviour of the world, they might conclude themselves duly entitled to eternal life. We find likewise all, or the greatest part at least, of the Epistles of St. *Paul* directed to all the Saints in general; and the superscription, without any partial preference to any of his own converts; "To all, that in every place, call on the name of *Jesus Christ*, as well as to the bishops and deacons".

IN a word, to determine the matter in question beyond all contradiction, our Blessed Saviour himself, in the words of the text, lays his absolute commands on the *Jews* in general, without the least reservation, to *search the Scriptures*; and the words immediately following assign the most solid and substantial reason for such injunction; *for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and 'tis they that testify of me*; which is the same thing as if he had said; Examine but with diligence and attention the books of the *Old Testament*, which you yourselves acknowledge, set forth the true way to eternal life;

life; and upon due trial you will find, that all those prophecies and types are fulfilled in me; and that all the promises of life there made, have respect to me, and point me out as the true Messiah.

I SHOULD now proceed to the third general head; namely, to shew you the important advantages arising from an assiduous application to the study of the sacred Scriptures; but I shall reserve those considerations, and the rules proposed to be laid down for reading those sacred treasures of true wisdom, with understanding, pleasure, and profit, for my next discourse.

Now to God the Father, &c.



SUNDAY



SUNDAY XVII.

* * On the Excellency of the sacred
* Scriptures.

JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.



IN my preceding discourse on the important subject before us, I proposed (if you remember) to enlarge on the four following particulars.

AND, in the first place, I undertook to lay before you the indispensable obligations we lie under to make the study of the sacred Scriptures our principal care and concern.

SECONDLY, to demonstrate, beyond all contradiction, that no persons, how illiterate or young soever,

soever, should be denied the privilege of searching those sacred Writings, those invaluable treasures of true wisdom, notwithstanding the use of them is prohibited by the Church of *Rome* to the vulgar, under the weak and frivolous pretence of their being liable, thro' their ignorance, to wrest the true and genuine sense of them to their own destruction.

THIRDLY, I proposed to lay before you the important advantages that will most assuredly arise from an unwearied and assiduous application to this most excellent study.

AND fourthly and lastly, to prescribe some few general rules, out of the many that might easily be produced, by the due observance whereof we may read and examine both the *Old* and *New Testament* throughout, with understanding, pleasure, and profit.

In my preceding discourse, I discussed the two first propositions, as fully as I imagined the nature of the case required; I shall therefore now proceed to the third article proposed, namely, to enumerate the important advantages that will most assuredly arise from an unwearied and assiduous application to this most excellent study.

Now it must be allowed, that in case it be a duty incumbent on all mankind to use his utmost endeavours to render his services as acceptable in the sight of God as possibly he can, and thereby attain the salvation of his precious and immortal soul; and if there be no readier method to secure that invaluable attainment to us; then we may irresistibly infer from thence, that 'tis every man's greatest interest and advantage to make that saving knowledge, those words of eternal life, his principal study and delight.

Now

Now this was the principal aim and design of God Almighty, in the revelation of his divine will, that mankind, who had for a long time wandered in the dark, and had been searching after happiness to very little, if any purpose at all, should at last be directed by an infallible guide, by the dictates of his own holy Spirit, to such a happiness as was suitable to the dignity of his nature, and equal to the most eager desires of an immortal Being. Those, who had only the light of nature, and their own weak reason to direct them, found themselves lost and bewildered in all their speculations, and harrassed and perplexed in all their most diligent researches after true felicity; they were conscious to themselves that they were weak and infirm, but did not know where to apply for a cure; that they were guilty of such sins as had provoked the Supreme Being, but were ignorant of the true methods requisite to be pursued, in order to appease his vengeance, and procure that reconciliation; that what hopes they entertained of God's favour and forgiveness, were without any just grounds for being assured of such an indulgence; and that they had nothing to console them in their most awful apprehensions of an offended Deity; but now, that eternal life, that everlasting happiness, which was sought after so diligently, but so ineffectually, by the dim light of nature, and the dictates of the most refined reason, is brought to light, and made manifest by the promulgation of the Gospel. By our diligent perusal of those sacred truths, the pleasing prospect of an endless state of bliss in another world is opened, as clear as possible, to the eye of our faith, and the duties that naturally and infallibly lead thereto, are distinctly proposed to our practice. In those sacred Writings we are sufficiently warned

warned of those enemies, that we are liable to meet with in our journey to that heavenly *Jerusalem*; and of the powerful attacks we are to expect in our spiritual warfare; and we are there instructed by what weapons, and by what prudent precautions their malice is to be defeated. Infallible remedies are therein prescribed for all our infirmities; if we are weary and heavy laden, in the Gospel, we are promised, by Christ himself, the Captain of our Salvation, that if we will but come unto him, he will give us rest; if we are conscious of our manifold transgressions, and are overwhelmed, and cast down with the melancholy thoughts which they create within us, we shall therein find comfort to our souls; therein shall we find a well-grounded assurance, upon our sincere repentance, of a full and free remission of all our sins; and if we but sincerely practise those duties that are therein prescribed, we may have just grounds to think, that we have, as our text expresses it, eternal life; or in other terms, if we are indefatigable in our searching the Scriptures, they will not only make us wise, but wise unto salvation.

If the Scriptures, however, were recommended to us only as matters of the greatest curiosity and speculation; as a discovery only of the nature of the Supreme Being, and other heavenly Intelligences; as an hypothesis only that determined the rewards of virtue, and the immortality of our internal and more noble part; that accounted for all the dark and intricate ways of heaven, the seemingly severe dispensations of Divine Providence; and, in a word, proposed an infallible specifick for healing the infirmities of our nature; our curiosity, one would imagine, if nothing else, would

find such an innocent, such an agreeable amusement, as would be sufficient to prevail on us to take delight in so noble and excellent a study: But when we come to reflect seriously within ourselves, that those Scriptures are the revealed Will of God, the words of eternal life; when we consider, that virtue and vice are therein delineated in their strongest colours, in order to recommend the one, and discountenance the other; and that the salvation of our souls is the sure consequence of our observance of the former, and abhorrence of the latter; when we give ourselves time, I say, to ponder on these weighty matters; with what assiduity, with what unwearied diligence, should we apply ourselves to a study that is of such moment and importance? All other researches, how delightful soever, when set in competition with this noblest of studies, will appear as empty and idle amusements. Notwithstanding we may have been conversant with the best systems of philosophy that the Antients ever wrote, and have perused, with the utmost care and attention, the most authentick histories of all nations; notwithstanding we may have worldly wisdom enough to form a proper judgment of all the secret springs, by which whole kingdoms are governed and directed, by their respective prime-ministers of state; yet if we are strangers to this true wisdom, to this one thing needful, all such worldly wisdom will avail us nothing; we shall have studied to no manner of purpose; and all our learning, in short, will be but what *Solemon* calls it, *vexation of spirit*.

SINCE then 'tis our greatest interest and advantage to be indefatigable in the pursuit of that wisdom, by which alone we may attain eternal life; and since the peril of damnation is annexed
to

to our wilful neglect of it, I shall proceed to the last article proposed, namely, to prescribe some few rules, by the due observance whereof, we may read and examine both the *Old and New Testament* throughout, with understanding, pleasure, and profit.

AND here let me exhort you, in the first place, never to fail of reading some part or portion of these divine Oracles, more or less, every day you live; because, by such frequent repetitions, you will receive the greatest assistances in the understanding their true and genuine sense. One of the best methods that can possibly be pursued in the interpretation of such places as are the most abstruse and obscure, is the comparison of one passage, or one expression with another. Now, in order to be enabled to do this effectually to your spiritual improvement, you must be conversant in the Scriptures, and have a comprehensive knowledge of them; and such a comprehension can by no other means be possibly attained, than by a daily and assiduous application to this sublime study. Most men, 'tis generally observed, have a natural propensity to decline this employment, as being somewhat irksome and tedious; for which reason, every true Christian should pursue this duty as assiduously and closely as possible, that by a constant habit, such reluctance may by degrees wear off; and the consideration of its being a duty incumbent on us, may induce us, in time, to take a greater delight in searching those sacred Volumes, than any amusements whatsoever of human composition.

I shall not attempt to determine how often in the day you ought to apply yourselves to this study, nor prescribe the stated hours, or the length

of time to be spent therein; because the variety of circumstances must be duly considered. Some persons may have but very little leisure, as servants and others, in a low station of life, for either reading or meditation; whilst others, to whom Providence has been more indulgent, are under no obligation to labour with their own hands for their daily subsistence, and may, if they please, by consequence, devote a greater share of their time, to such devotional exercises. From him who has but little, but little is required. They, however, who are under the most servile state, and cannot call their time their own, may, in a christian country, at least, find some leisure hours for their attendance on this necessary duty. If their callings be ever so laborious, or require ever so constant an application to them on the week-days, there is one day, however, in the revolution of seven, wherein their service is not required, and which they may, if they please, and are in duty bound, to devote to the worship of God, both in publick and private; and as the intervals are large between the services at church, there are full opportunities enough to be embraced for reading the holy Scriptures, and making the precepts therein contained, the subjects of their meditation. Insomuch that, to trifle those valuable hours away, either in indolence and inactivity; or to prophane them, by devoting them to worldly amusements, would be perfect sacrilege, and altogether inexcusable. In short, every one ought to be true and faithful to himself, and if he be, his own conscience will either acquit or condemn him. If the study of God's Word be looked upon as a task imposed upon him, and the duty is done with reluctance; if he makes frivolous excuses, and
prefers

prefers either business or pleasure before the exercise of his duty, he has too just grounds to suspect himself guilty of disaffection, both to God and his service; his own conscience will accuse him, and God, who is omniscient, and knows the inmost secrets of his heart, will not be imposed upon by idle excuses.

SINCE these sacred Oracles then, are acknowledged to contain in them the most wholesome counsels, and that they are, or at least ought to be, the rule and measure of all our actions, we ought to lay them always before our eyes, and by a repeated application to the study of them, should imprint them on our minds, and, upon every emergency, be able to refer ourselves to this standard of good and evil; but more especially, since the Scriptures are the revealed Will of God, and our infallible guide to a state of everlasting felicity, no time should be grudged, no pains should be spared, in making ourselves fully acquainted with all its precepts. The royal Psalmist, who had the distinguishing character of being a man after God's own heart, used to make this important study his principal delight, and would sometimes spend all the day long in meditating upon them in his closet. He assures us, that those heavenly treasures were infinitely more valuable than all the riches in the world, and that they deserve to be sought after with more diligence and assiduity than the gold of *Ophir*. And if the books of the *Old Testament* were, in his eye, of so inestimable a value, which had in them only the shadow of things, that were, in process of time, to come to pass; how much more eager ought we to be, to make the Gospels our principal study and delight, wherein life and immortality are brought

to light; wherein our hopes are assured of everlasting life, and our actions are directed to that important attainment?

AND as we ought to read these Scriptures more or less every day, so we ought to read them with the closest attention; for to run them over in a cursory manner, as we would only a trivial composition, is an indignity offered to that holy Spirit, by whom the persons, who wrote them were immediately inspired. How highly blame-worthy are we, when we pay so little reverential awe to the Divine Author of them, and give ourselves so little time to reflect on the important subjects whereof they treat, as to read them in a careless and remiss manner, as an unwelcome task imposed upon us, which we would dispatch as soon as possible! To what good effect, with what prospect of improving our minds, can we read a book over with such hurry and precipitation, the sense whereof we are not in the least solicitous of enquiring after? Such a treatment of them is almost as disrespectful as throwing them totally aside; since either of them is (as we before observed) a flagrant affront to the holy Spirit, whose sacred authority they bear.

IN order to secure us, therefore, from being guilty of so gross an insult, thro' our negligence, and want of due attention; the next rule I shall prescribe, is, to read them with the utmost reverence and respect. By reverence, I mean, with that humility and submission as is due from a creature to his Creator, that subjection to his Divine Will, which engages us to acquiesce in all those articles which he would have us believe, and all those duties which he expects, and commands us to practise; tho' some of the former may possibly be

be above the reach of our weak capacities fully to comprehend.

To a sincere Christian, every article that is introduced into the sacred Scriptures, and consequently is a part of the revealed Will of God, ought to be sufficient to gain his ready assent, tho' it be above his reason, if it be not absolutely inconsistent with it. Should Divine Revelation be urged, indeed, as an artifice and pretence to justify any text that is diametrically opposite to that light, which God has implanted in our nature; such, for instance, as that absurd doctrine of Transubstantiation, so strenuously inculcated by the *Romish* Church, we may safely reject it as an erroneous principle; and to give our assent thereto would be ridiculous, and not an act of faith, but of the grossest superstition. That this is a perfect delusion, a pious fraud, only to impose on the ignorance and stupidity of the vulgar, our sense of sight itself is able to determine. If we cannot be certain, that their Wafer is no God, as they pretend it to be, then we can never be assured that any thing is actually true; and altho' our Saviour said (when he took the bread, and broke it at the passover) *This is my body*; yet those words can never be understood by any wise man in a literal sense. For he had in other places asserted, that he was a Vine, a Door, the good Shepherd, and the like, but no one in his senses ever interpreted these expressions of his to be literally true, but looked upon them as Similitudes only, to render his discourse familiar and obvious to the weak understandings of his hearers. 'Tis downright scandalous therefore, and the highest indignity imaginable offered to the Divine Majesty, to put such a construction on his most sacred Word, as must un-

avoidably expose them to the contempt and ridicule of every impartial and considerate enquirer. Where propositions are laid down, that are dark and intricate, and above the reach of human comprehension, if there be a possibility of their being true, and if they be not diametrically opposite to that religion which the Almighty has implanted in our nature; in matters, indeed, so deeply concealed, we must, and ought to acquiesce and submit, where Divine Authority has determined the question. We must not presume to exalt ourselves against the Almighty, and make our shallow reason the measure of truth and duty. If we read therefore his Word with that holy reverence, meekness, and humility as we ought, God will reveal his Mysteries to us, and discover the hidden treasures of that wisdom to us, which will make us wise unto salvation. We must not search into our own understandings for the compleat rule of our faith and actions, but into the sacred Scriptures, which are to be revered by us, as they are the dictates of the holy Spirit, and not the result of any human composition.

BUT besides this reverential awe that is due to the great Author of the Scriptures, we ought and must shew another instance of our humility, in not relying too far on our own judgments in the interpretation of them.

ALL Scripture, indeed, was written, as St. Paul assures us, by the Inspiration of God, for the instruction of man, and there is no one part of it altogether useless, and unfit to be read or studied; but then we are to consider, that every article, that is absolutely requisite to be rightly understood, is so plain and obvious to the weakest understanding, that he may run who reads it. At the same time,

it must be acknowledged, that there are some passages interspersed throughout those sacred Writings, so intricate and perplex, that the wisest and best of men now living will find it a difficult task to give them a fair and unanswerable solution; and others again so deep and mysterious, that no one will, without an immediate inspiration from heaven, be ever able to interpret, 'till that time shall come, when all things shall be laid open to publick view, and we shall know as we are known. It is highly requisite, therefore, that such as are illiterate should proceed in this important study with the utmost humility and precaution; tho' I would not advise them to resign themselves up implicitly to the interpretation of any one person, how remarkable soever he may be for his judgment in the Arcana of divine Oracles. He ought not, neither can he, by any authority whatever, be compelled to understand any portion of the sacred Scriptures in such a sense, as will make the proposition false beyond all contradiction. It is evident, however, that the unlettered Christian must, in many instances of his enquiry into the genuine meaning, and true sense of some particular passages, be determined by some authority or another; and since there is an Order of men, whose sole employment and duty it is to serve at the Altar, and be mighty in the Scriptures, and who are constituted by proper authority, to be guides to the feet of the laity, and a lanthorn to their paths; 'tis highly requisite and fitting, that such as are but in low circumstances, and men of lower attainments, should, with all due humility, consult those who are appointed to be their spiritual Pastors, and on whose judgment they may presume, if they be endowed with any
modesty

modesty at all, is much superior to their own. Let every person, therefore, study the Scriptures as often as they think proper, be they ever so young or illiterate, without the least restriction; as the practice is highly commendable, and a duty incumbent on them; but then let them apply themselves to those parts of Scripture first, as are most obvious and easy; for if they content themselves with that only, they will, 'tis possible, do as much as God Almighty, who is all indulgence, will require at their hands: but in case their thirst after divine knowledge shall prompt them to make farther researches, let them, with the modesty of the *Eunuch*, recorded in the *Acts* of the *Apostles*, apply themselves to some person of greater abilities, to lead them into the direct road to heaven, lest they should chance to be bewildered, and unhappily run astray.

THE next and last rule that I shall lay down for the unlettered Christian's observation, is this, that he consults the Scriptures, without the least prejudice or prepossession. The Word of God must have no constraint laid upon it, must not be made to speak that which it never intended. They, who read it with such restrictions, fight against God himself, and do violence to the holy Spirit; instead of making those sacred Writings the rule of their faith and actions, they most presumptuously, nay, I may say, impiously, give a law to the Scriptures; they wrest them to their own destruction, and render themselves altogether unqualified for that best and most excellent study.

AND in order that this may not be the case of any one unhappy person here assembled, I shall only add this fervent prayer to Almighty God for them, that he would aid and assist them, and all
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of us, in our applications to this study ; that he would enlarge our understandings, and remove the mists of ignorance from before our eyes, and most graciously guide and direct us into the knowledge of the truth ; that he would enable us, by his grace, so to hear, mark, learn, and inwardly digest his holy Word, that the fruit thereof may appear in our sound faith, and our regular practice of every christian virtue.

Now to God the Father, &c.



SUNDAY



SUNDAY XVIII.

 Temporal Afflictions advantageous.

PSALM CXIX, 71.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted.



PICTETUS sums up the whole difficulty of Virtue in these two words ὑπέχειν and ἐπέχειν, *i. e.*—to bear,—and to forbear.—The old philosophers differed pretty much in their sentiments, concerning which was the hardest, and by consequence, the noblest part.

BUT in my opinion, the contest might soon have been ended :—he that is proof against temptation, and can abstain from offered pleasures, is certainly a brave man ; but he, who, with a calm and tranquil mind, can, without repining, resign himself to all the buffets of misery and affliction,
is

is something more :—he has shook off mortality, and all its little imbecilities, and breathes a purer, nobler essence.

THE character of *Curius* makes a noble figure in the *Roman History*, who, in the midst of extreme poverty, refused the pompous presents of the *Samnites*, when his virtue was to be the purchase of them ; but how far is it eclipsed by that of *Regulus*, who voluntarily submitted himself to the severest of torments, and postponed his life to his honour, and the love of his country ?

PAIN is undoubtedly the grand antipathy of human nature ; nay, of nature in general ;—for the very brutes are as strongly actuated by instinct, as man by reason, to avoid it.—On which account, the sanctions of laws seem to be founded rather on punishments than rewards. The rack and gibbet will sometimes prove more effectual than all the honours of an empire ; and a man may be terrified from the commission of an action, which half the world would not bribe him to abstain from.

EPICURUS had so dreadful a notion of pain, that he taught, that the whole of pleasure consisted in a freedom, or vacation from it ; and a fit of the stone made one of *Zeno's* disciples cry out, that his master was a liar, when he told him, *that pain was no evil.*

IN the case of *Job*, the Devil seems to have such an opinion of the efficacy of it, that he scruples not to affirm, that all *Job's* righteousness could not be proof against it ; but that, if he should be touched with any sensible afflictions, he would presently change his note, and instead of his usual praises and eulogiums, curse God to his face.

HAPPILY for us (who should have lost an inestimable treasure in such an example) he failed in his conjecture : the virtuous man bore every onset,
how

how violent soever, with all the calmness of true philosophy, which is founded in religion, and the fear of God.

YET even he could not entirely stifle nature, (strong as he had curbed her) but in the extremity of his anguish, how solemnly does he curse the day and hour of his birth^(a)!—How pathetically does he bemoan the disagreeable union of life and misery, and how ardently does he pray for death, as a state, with all its uncertainty, much more eligible than certain affliction!

THE disciples of our Lord, who long had followed the Blessed Wanderer, (*who had not a place to lay his head*, or in other terms, no convenience of entertaining them in an hospitable and agreeable manner) who had been happy in all his consolatory precepts, and enlivening discourses; even they, tho' at first active enough in their endeavours to rescue their master, if possible; yet, when they see him taken, in all probability, to be put to death; when they see that further perseverance may expose them to like dangers; their apprehensions get the better of their duty, and they all forsake him and flee.—Even he, who had but just before drawn the sword in his defence, is the first to disclaim acquaintance with him; he, who but a few hours before, had been the forwardest and warmest in his professions;—^(b) *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee*; when charged with being his friend, most solemnly and most shamefully disowns the glorious title.

FROM such considerations arose that famous question, which was so long and so strenuously banded about by the old philosophers, What is

(a) Job III. 3, &c.

(b) Matth. XXVI, 35, *et pass.*

the origin of evil? From whence proceeds that which is in itself so pernicious a mischief, and productive of so many more? It is very certain (at least as certain as any thing here can be) that afflictions do not always fall with weight on the heads of those whose actions seem to deserve them; nor is temporal happiness an infallible consequence of virtue.

SINCE then, there are numbers in this world, who do not deserve it, and divers crimes are even grounded upon them; since murmuring, lying, deceiving and stealing proceed often from pain and want, the question is, why is affliction so frequent?—And why was that bitter dispensation, the cup of misery, ever introduced at the banquet of this life?

THE antient *Persians*, thinking this inconsistent with the divine goodness, endeavoured to solve it, by supposing the world to be subject to two contrary Principles; the one just and benevolent, whom they called *Oramasdes*, the other cruel and malicious, named *Arimanius*; to the former they imputed all kinds of good, and to the latter every kind of evil.

THIS notion was afterwards adopted by a set of Hereticks in the Christian Church, called *Manichees*, founded by one *Manes*, in the third Century, who learned it, indeed, from the books of one *Terebintbus*, who was by profession a *Magian*; the name by which that sect had formerly been distinguished in *Persia*.

NAY, at this very day, 'tis said that some of the western *Indians* continue it so far, as even to pay a religious worship to the evil Principle, or the Devil, in order, as they say, to engage him not to afflict or molest them.

BUT

BUT after all, 'tis certain, that such notions, how plausible soever they may seem, proceed not, in reality, from any due concern for the divine honour; but in fact, either from short-sightedness and inconsideration; or from the want of a religious enquiry into the glorious and astonishing dispensations of that Providence, by which this world is governed.

FOR I trust, there is nothing in it but what may be very safely solved upon other principles (*salvis Dei attributis*, as the school-phrase has it) without prejudice to any of the divine attributes.

WITH respect, indeed, to moral evil, we may venture to side with them, and allow the Devil the honour of being the fountain of all wickedness; since nothing of that kind can proceed from God.

BUT as for human evils (our present subject) we need not (dreadful as they seem) scruple to ascribe them to the all-wise author and disposer of all things. 'Tis very certain, as the wise Uzzite (*d*) observed, that *affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground*; but that whatsoever is done upon earth, God doth it himself.—'Tis he who *maketh a fruitful land barren* (*e*);—that *killeth as well as giveth life*; (*f*)—and whose hand holds the scourge, as well as the sceptre of peace, and the horn of plenty.

WE have no less authority than his own sacred Word to back us; for, *Lo! I am the Lord*, says he, *and there is none else* (*g*).—*I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace and create evil.*—*I, the Lord, doe all these things.*

(*d*) Job V, 6.

(*e*) Psalm CXVII, 34.

(*f*) 1 Sam. II, 6.

(*g*) Isa. XLV, 6, 7.

Now this, one would think, were a sufficient motive to make us patient and resigned under afflictions, since they are dispensed to us by the hand of our all-wise and Almighty Creator, who, by virtue of that title, has an undoubted right to dispose of us in such manner as he pleases. He, who gave *all*, may certainly take away some part, nay, that *all*, if he think proper, without the imputation of injustice. *Shall we therefore receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil (b)?*—Well! said *Eli*, in such a juncture, *it is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good (i)*.

SHOULD it then be his gracious will to visit us with the rod of affliction, with pains, or poverty, that were our surest, and only refuge. *The potsherds might strive with the potsherds of the earth; but wo to him that striveth with his Maker!* (k) But far be it from the Almighty to have pleasure in the misery of his creatures!—We know, that *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men (l)*. How long has he borne with repeated insults and impieties, and withheld himself even from just and righteous vengeance!

WHAT shall we say then? Must we not necessarily conclude, that these are not ills, even when they light upon the righteous man, but rather signal marks of the Divine favour and goodness? Nay, we must be very hardened indeed, if a little consideration will not demonstrate to us, that *it is always good for us to have been afflicted (m)*.

How noble is that passage of *Seneca*, a heathen, but a true philosopher!

(b) Job II, 10.

(i) 1 Sam. III, 18.

(k) Isa. XLV, 9.

(l) Lament. III, 33.

(m) Text.

"*QUÆ vere, &c.* (n) Vice and wickedness, which are real evils, God never suffers the virtuous man to be visited with. Why then does he meet with such severe trials, as poverty, banishment, and the like? For a lesson to others: he is born but for an example".

"SUPPOSE God thus expostulating with him; What hast thou to complain, thou, whose delight is in virtue? I have loaded others with false happiness; I have decked them with gold and silver, and precious stones: internal satisfaction they have none; their happiness is not solid or sincere: I have given thee blessings certain and permanent; I have taught thee to despise what the generality of mankind fear, and to look with contempt on what they covet. You make not, indeed, a pompous appearance;—your happiness is within yourself. I have exposed you to cares, sorrows, and afflictions; but I have enabled you to bear them all".

BUT to proceed; affliction sometimes becomes absolutely necessary, to bring us to a true sense of our own condition, which some accidents of life, tend but too much to make us forget. *Before I was troubled, I went wrong* (o); says the Psalmist, *but now I have kept thy word*: from which he very wisely concludes, in the words of the Text, that *it was good for him that he had been afflicted*.

THERE is not so sure a consequence of prosperity, as pride and haughtiness of soul. Men, who have been used to be denied nothing, are apt to think they have an indisputable right to every thing. They, who have been always accustomed to command, hardly know the meaning of the

(n) *De Provid. c. 6.*

(o) *Pf. CXIX, 67.*

word *Obedience*, except when it is to be used towards themselves.

It was remarkably the case of the *Israelites*; it was only in *their distress* that they called upon the Lord; in *their affliction* they will seek me early^(p), saith the Lord, by his servant *Hosea*. And indeed, it was often the sole end of those distresses to engage them so to do; for they were exceeding apt to abuse prosperity; as *Moses* seems to be very sensible of, by so solemnly cautioning them against it. *When thou shalt have eaten, and be full*, (says he) *then beware, lest thou forget the Lord* (q). This we have in the sixth chapter of *Deuteronomy*, and it is again, and rather more largely, repeated in the eighth (r).—*Agur*, in the Book of *Proverbs*, prays against prosperity as a kind of curse, for this remarkable reason, *lest* (says he) *I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?* We have a notable instance of this in *Nebuchadnezzar*: he saw himself at the head of a great and opulent monarchy; he wallowed in plenty, and was honoured by men almost to adoration. The height turned his brain; he fancied himself I know not what, 'till God checked his career, and by severe afflictions brought him back to his senses. In him we also see the happy effect of those afflictions; for great as he even now fancied himself, he is quickly glad to confess *the everlasting dominion of God, that all the inhabitants of the earth are as nothing before him*, and that *those that walk in pride, he is able to abase* (s).

(p) Hof. V, 15.

(q) Deut. VI, 11, 12.

(r) Deut. VIII, 10, &c.

(s) Dan. IV, 30, &c. 35, &c.

EVEN *David*, the man after God's own Heart, confesses, as I have before observed, that *before he was afflicted he went wrong.*

AFFLICTIONS then serve to these two special purposes; first, to give us a due sense of our own weakness and dependency; and then to illustrate the exceeding great power, and majesty of God, with whom our greatest strength is but weakness, our deepest wisdom ignorance, and folly in the abstract.

AND 'tis also certain, that these ends could no way else be so well answered; additional happiness would be an additional obduracy. Pride would stop our ears to persuasion, and nothing but the rod could awake us to reason and obedience. And since those only must be the foundations of our eternal and essential happiness, we are under a necessity of concluding, that we are never afflicted but for our advantage, and that 'tis *of very faithfulness* and compassion, that *God causes us to be troubled* (t).

SOMETIMES we are visited, to prevent us from crimes which we are about to commit; and thus, by a short trial of temporal calamities, we are often secured from eternal misery.

AND sometimes, by way of punishment for crimes actually committed; when we may think ourselves happy, if we can get off for the severest tortures here, in lieu of what we might have expected hereafter, and I hope I do not err in this conclusion; for great is the mercy of God, *he will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever* (u).

(t) Pf. CXIX, 75.

(u) Pf. CIII, 9.

I HAVE often thought, that there is a great deal of kindness and charity in *David's* curses, bitter as they seem. He wishes, to his greatest enemies, no other, than what, as he tells us, he has felt to his advantage, *viz.* temporal afflictions; the end of which, he generally prays, may be, that they may be convinced of the Divine Sovereignty, and *know, that God ruleth in Jacob, and unto the ends of the earth (w).*

THEY are, indeed, sometimes, pretty strongly expressed; but that is a peculiarity of the language; a thing frequent in all the Oriental Writings:—and to take them in the full meaning of the letter, were to do an unpardonable violence to the character of that pious and just prince.

ANOTHER great, and indeed merciful end, is best answered by affliction,—that is, to draw our attention from this world, which God never intended for our *continuing city*; and which an uninterrupted scene of prosperity might so endear to us, that we might not wish for, scarce so much as think of, that future happiness which he graciously designed us; and which, by consequence, our indifference would hazard the loss of. We might be weak enough to sit down contented here, and barter heaven for a gew-gaw play-thing.

THE *Israelites* in *Egypt* were a kind of type of this disposition, as their afflictions were of human misery in general; in the first, we see the violence of our propensity to present ease and pleasure, preferable even to far greater in futurity. In the latter, the unbounded mercy of God, who kindly removes all the bars and blocks which we throw in our own way, and endeavours to make us hap-

py, even in spite of ourselves.—While our lives are easy and pleasant, we think as little of heaven, nay, of death indeed, as they did of *Canaan*. We plant, we build, and lay a noble scheme of pleasure in our sordid *Egypt*, and do not extend one wish beyond it, 'till a little affliction dashes our cup, and convinces us, that this is not the seat of our repose. Thus does it again become a happy means, not only of weaning us from our foolish fondness for this world, but also of diverting our prospect another way, and directing our search to a place, where true joys are to be found, and such as shall not be liable to those frequent and sharp alloys to which every thing sublunary is exposed.

THIS is natural; for pleasure is the universal aim, as well as pain the universal antipathy. Thus, when a man finds 'tis impossible for him to be happy here, if he be not a mere idiot, he will earnestly set about endeavouring to secure himself a place in which he may be happy hereafter.

FOR my own part, I cannot conceive a greater misfortune that could happen to man, than to be compleatly happy here, to have *his portion* (as the Psalmist expresses it) *in this life**. For 'tis certain, that such a state would be apt to stagger the strongest faith, and to raise a suspicion whether there were, or whether there were, indeed, any occasion for an hereafter.

WE see the consequence of this, in the case of *Dives* in the parable(x); he is forced to put up with the bitter reflection of having had his day, whilst *Lazarus*, after a short purgation of afflictions, takes possession of a portion which shall never fail him.

* Ps. XVII, 14.

(x) Luke XVI, 19.

HERE then let us hold.—That affliction, so far from being an evil, is a very strong and evident instance of God's affection for us; (the greatest good we can even conceive) and that *happy is the man whom God correcteth* (y).

WHEN our natural parents corrected us, 'twas certainly with the sole view of making us wiser and better, and, by consequence, happier men. The success has always proved it. *A child, left to himself, bringeth his parents to shame; but the rod and reproof give wisdom* (z).

CAN we then suppose, that the correction of that indulgent parent can be less beneficial, or that he, whose tenderness exceeds theirs as far as his wisdom, ever afflicts us, but for some wise and merciful end?

GOLD is tried in the fire; men in the furnace of adversity (a); from which they both return with additional splendor and value.—Misery is as natural to us, as it is *for the sparks to fly upwards* (b); but *when he hath tried us, we shall come forth as gold* (c).

THERE is another very useful property of affliction, which I can by no means omit taking notice of, and that is, that it creates in us a compassionate sense of the miseries of our fellow-creatures, and a readiness to relieve their distresses. When we have tasted of misery ourselves, we shall be much more ready to pity others, than if we had never been troubled. The poor man finds

(y) Job V, 17.

(z) Prov. HXIX, 15.

(a) Eccclus. XI, 5.

(b) Job V, 7.

(c) Job XXIII, 10.

no where so little comfort and relief, as at the door of the rich, and the great, whose station has never given them leave to know, or even guess at the extream bitterness of want.—On the contrary, it is natural for every one, to pity in others those afflictions, and those most, which they have felt themselves. A man, who has been racked with the gout, or stone, feels his pain, in a manner renewed, at the bare mention of them in another person.

I HAVE read of some, who being troubled with particular distempers, have built hospitals for the relief of such as should be afflicted with the like.

THUS this mighty bugbear, which startles all nature at a distance, when we come to view her nearer, loses all her deformity. When we behold her in this light, we consider her no longer as a hideous and affrighting fury, but rather as an attendant Angel, who kindly recalls our wandering steps, and directs them in that sole path, which must lead us to our eternal rest.

WHETHER afflictions be sent for the punishment of some misdemeanour, or only for the trial of our virtue and obedience; whether to check our own vain opinion of ourselves, or to raise our faint and languid ideas of the Supreme Being; whether to withdraw our misguided affections from the vanities of this world, and to awake us to a contemplation of the sincere enjoyments of heaven, or to excite in us those necessary virtues, which must entitle us to them; we cannot, in any one instance, discover a single mark of wrath, resentment, or ill-will in the Almighty; but rather an astonishing overflow of love, mercy, and compassion.

If we need any further motives to a patient endurance of these visitations, let us look back on the bright examples which have gone before us; let us see with what firm resolution, what pious resignation, what calmness, nay, rather, what cheerfulness, numbers have already trod this painful wine-press; and let those considerations provoke, or at least, shame us to the imitation.—How noble is the behaviour of holy *Job*, under the severest and most trying calamities! In him we have a true instance of afflicted virtue; since his miseries were professedly nothing more than for the trial of his patience and obedience, no visitation for past crimes, no check, or memorandum to his duty, a thing which his compleat piety and integrity exempted him from the need of; yet how calmly does he bear it all, and (d) even vindicate the justice of God to his wife and others, who seem to reflect upon him upon his account! Let us consider the unparalleled sufferings of the Blessed Saints and Martyrs; and also the unequalled constancy, with which they bore them:—Lastly, let us look on the great (e) *Author and Finisher of our faith*, who endured such a variety of sorrows, without a murmur; but even in the extremity of his agony, when *his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*, and his pores transpired blood, we hear him breathing out this pious submission: *Father, not my will, but thine be done* (f).—Let us farther, like him, look forward to the reward that is set before us, which we

(d) Job II, 10.

(e) Heb. XII, 2.

(f) Luke XXII, 42.

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are allowed to do, that we may, by all means, *with patience run the (g) race that is set before us, how thorny soever it be; that when we have been tried, we may receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him (b).*

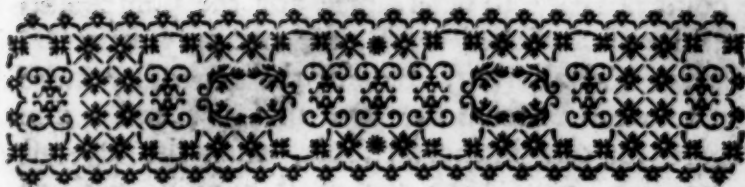
MAY God, of his infinite mercy, include us in that happy company! To whom be all Honour, Glory and Praise, Might, Majesty and Dominion, both now and for evermore. *Amen.*

(g) Heb. XII, 1.

(b) James I, 12.



SUNDAY



SUNDAY XIX.

The Advantages of an unshaken Integrity.

JOB XXVII, 5, 6.

——: *Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me.*

My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.



JOB, in this book of the sacred Scriptures, is recommended to us as one, who was endowed with an invincible resolution, and an unshaken integrity; not only whilst he was in the most prosperous and flourishing circumstances, but when he was overwhelmed with sorrow, and acquainted with griefs; and in which of these two opposite estates, these two dangerous extremes,

extremes, he met with the greater temptations, is a point not easy to determine; for the pomps and vanities of a wicked world, are not only very attractive and alluring, but for the generality more apt to wean us from the love of God, and a due regard for our immortal souls, than the severest calamities, nay, than the most agonizing pains that human nature is able to sustain; so that the pious deportment of *Job*, is as much, if not more, to be admired, and as difficult to be imitated, in the day of his prosperity, as his meekness and patience, his acquiescence in, and resignation to the seemingly severe dispensations of Divine Providence, and the surprising, as well as sudden change of his condition, from a boundless affluence, and the enjoyment of all his heart could wish, to the lowest and most deplorable circumstances that can possibly be conceived.

If therefore we take but a view of *Job* in his utmost prosperity, in all his affluence, surrounded with his friends and dependents, possessed of herds beyond number, and a variety of stately and magnificent palaces; if we will but view him blessed with a numerous and hopeful issue, and the favour and good will of all men; and in one day fallen from all this pomp and grandeur, from all this scene of happiness, and tho' plunged at once into an abyss of misery, absolutely resigned, and submissive to the Divine Will; we cannot but allow him to be an illustrious instance of the most heroic patience:—when the affrighted messengers informed him, that his flocks and herds were wrested from him by the sons of violence; that his servants were slain by the edge of the sword; that his sheep were all destroyed by the fire of God from heaven; and what was still a heavier judgment, his sons and daughters buried in the ruins of the house,

house, where, thoughtless of any danger; they were feasting with their friends and relations; notwithstanding all this long train of unforeseen distress, he does not rudely expostulate with God, tax heaven with injustice, or offer violence, in a fit of despair, to his own life, and curse the Author of his Being; but on the contrary, he humbles himself, in a very signal manner before the Almighty.—*Naked, says he, came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.—And in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.*

As a further trial of his resignation, God permitted *Satan* to afflict him with sore boils, from the sole of his foot unto his crown. He patiently, and without any indecent murmur or complaint, bore this additional affliction likewise; *he took a potsherd, we are told, to scrape himself withal, and sat down among the ashes.* And when his wife, in a fit of rage and resentment, impiously persuaded him to *curse God and die*, without hesitation, he rebuked her in the following remarkable terms.—*Thou speakest, said he, as one of the foolish women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* And amidst these many sorrows *Job did not sin with his lips*; under all these afflictions he never uttered one indecent or unseemly word against his God, but received evil at his hands, with the same grateful sense of his Omnipotence, as he was wont to receive good; and was even more calm and serene, more patient and submissive under these severe trials, these distracting calamities, than other men, for the most part, are, under the greatest affluence and temporal enjoyments. He was determined, that whatever befel him in this life, that he would never
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contest with his Maker, never do any thing that might create his displeasure, or wound that blessed peace and tranquillity of mind, which was his never-failing refuge under all these afflictions, which, to any one less upright and righteous than himself, had been altogether insupportable. *Till I die, says he, I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*

As the history of that truly pious and upright man, of whom I have been speaking, is transmitted to us for our imitation and improvement, and as it is a narrative so universally admired by all those, who make the study of the sacred Scriptures their delight as well as duty; I am fully persuaded, that the greater part of my hearers have frequently perused it with attention; and to such at least, I doubt not, but the following lessons of instruction, which naturally arise from the subject, will be thought worthy of their most serious meditation; namely,

I. THAT we should so behave ourselves in the day of prosperity, and make such a good use of the blessings, which God shall vouchsafe to bestow upon us, that if ever it should be our hard lot to be deprived of them, we may, like our grand Exemplar, have no room to reproach ourselves on that account.

II. AND secondly, That we should never remove our integrity from us, *i. e.* let no motive, no consideration, how plausible soever, prevail upon us to do any thing repugnant to the commands of God, and the conviction of our own consciences.

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FIRST then, That we should so behave ourselves in the day of prosperity, and make such a good use of the blessings which God shall vouchsafe to bestow upon us, that if ever we should come to be deprived of them, we may have no more room, than our grand Exemplar, to reproach ourselves on that account.

THERE is nothing more certain, than that, whilst we live in affluence and ease, we have not so lively a sense of good and evil, nor will we suffer our consciences to speak so openly and freely to us, as when the world frowns upon us, and we are overwhelmed, as it were, with a sea of troubles; whilst we enjoy an uninterrupted state of prosperity; whilst we are debarred from none of the sensual enjoyments of this life; the noise and bustle of the world, the mirth and gaiety of our companions, and the variety of objects that every moment surround us, do for the generality engross so much of our thoughts, that our consciences are lulled asleep, and the soft whispers of the mind are not duly listened to, amidst the circle of pleasures which play about our senses. However, when once we meet with crosses and disappointments, with anxious cares and troubles; when our gayest hopes are wholly blasted; or when we are apprehensive that death is making his awful approaches towards us, with a summons to judgment, then conscience takes the alarm; then our sins fly in our faces, and fill our minds with horror and despair, with heart-tormenting fears, and a long train of uncomfortable reflections.—'Tis then we begin to bewail our past follies, and behold the joys of this world in their true and proper light. The sun-shine of prosperity sets a deceitful gloss upon these transitory enjoyments, but sickness and adversity, for the most part, opens
our

eyes, and removes that false glitter, that veil, which luxury and excess had thrown over them. When we are languishing on a bed of sickness, our consciences will reproach us in the severest manner, for those many days of health, which we have so unthoughtfully squandered away, and misemployed. Should misfortunes overtake us, how deep will the reflection sink into our souls, that too great a part of our former wealth, was perhaps procured by acts of injustice and deceit! Or suppose we have been so thoughtful of our own peace, and so just to our neighbours, as not to be exposed to a reproach of that nature; suppose our consciences should therein acquit us; yet, whenever we stand in need of the charitable aid and assistance of others, shall we not be confounded, if we reflect how unapt we were to be moved with the least pity or compassion for the sufferings and misfortunes of our neighbours; how loth we were, in our flourishing state and condition, to bestow the smallest portion of our abundance on the poor and needy; how many were naked, and we cloathed them not, hungry, and we fed them not; sick and in prison, and we visited them not; neither took we any care to alleviate their distress?

LET therefore such reflections as these, whilst we abound with the good things of this life, remind us, that how prosperous soever our state and condition now may be, that even the revolution of an hour may make it the reverse; he who is looked upon to-day as the happiest of mortals, to-morrow may become the just object of pity and compassion. Consider, therefore, before the evil day comes; reflect with yourselves, that tho' you are now possessed of all the comforts and conveniencies that this life can possibly afford you; yet you know not how soon you may be deprived of these

these valuable blessings. And that our consciences, to whose soft whispers we would not lend a listening ear in our prosperity, will force us, when the evil day comes on, to acknowledge, that solid happiness can proceed only from virtue and religion.

LET me, therefore, once more press those who are in prosperity, so to behave, as that they may have nothing wherewith to reproach themselves, if ever misfortunes should attend them. It was holy *Job's* peculiar consolation and support, that tho' he was instantaneously, as it were, reduced from the highest pitch of wealth and honour, to the lowest degree of poverty and distress, yet he held fast his integrity; and tho' he was of all men the most miserable, yet he wisely determined, that his heart should not reproach him so long as he lived.—This reflection very naturally brings me to my

SECOND article, namely, that we should never remove our integrity from us, *i. e.* we should let no motive, no consideration, how plausible soever, prevail upon us, to do any thing repugnant to the commands of God, and the conviction of our own consciences.

PEACE of mind is, doubtless, of more value than any other temporal enjoyment whatsoever, and there is no pain so insupportable as that which proceeds from shame and guilt; for which reason, whatever external advantages we may acquire, at the expence of our integrity, we are certainly great losers by them, and pay extravagantly dear for such unjust acquisitions. A very little reflection will convince any one, that no real benefit can be obtained by sinister practices, and that a guilty conscience, is assuredly, of all evils, the most dreadful: the just and perfect man has something

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to

to support him under the greatest temporal afflictions; the peace of a good conscience, the hopes of God's favour and loving-kindness, and the inward tranquillity of his own mind, will wonderfully carry him thro' the severest trials and temptations that he can possibly meet with in this world; will withhold and support him under every tribulation; whereas, if a man's mind be troubled with guilt and shame, where can he fly for refuge?—To whom can he apply for safety or relief?

MOREOVER, to obtain the character of a just and upright man, is, doubtless, of all acquisitions the most desirable; it may not, therefore, be amiss to give you a transient view of what we mean by a person of that wish'd-for denomination. Now I take him to be a truly just man, who will never, either thro' fear or favour, consent to do the least act that appears to him to be unworthy or unbecoming, or that he cannot justify to God and his own conscience; such a man will resolutely adhere to his duty, tho' it should expose him to a thousand inconveniencies.

IN short, he who is tenacious of his integrity, and walks uprightly with his God, is sure to meet with his reward here, as well as hereafter; for there is nothing that contributes more to our safety, even in the worst and most perilous times, than a firm and steady adherence to our duty: by such a deportment, we most effectually recommend ourselves to the protection of the Almighty, and his good providence, and we may rest assured, whilst no dangers, no adversities, no hopes of worldly interest and advantage, or the fears of poverty, or total ruin itself, can prevail with us to disobey his righteous commands, that he will never leave or forsake us, but will either deliver us from those evils we would shun, or else, by the aid
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and assistance of his Blessed Spirit, enable us to bear them with patience and resolution.

BESIDES, there is this to be considered;—what we look upon as heavy afflictions, oftentimes prove the greatest mercies. The principal design of God, in his severest dispensations, is to melt and soften our hearts to such a degree as he finds necessary, in order to wean our affections gently from that complacency and delight, which we are so apt to take in things below; to convince us of the transports of those above, the shortness of time, and the duration of eternity. The just and upright man, therefore, hath nothing to fill his mind with anxious fears or apprehensions; he hath no secret guilt that appeals, affrights, or severely threatens him; amidst all worldly distractions and confusions, he is no ways troubled or dismayed; his innocence inspires him with boldness; he can cheerfully trust his God with all that is near and dear to him, and with an humble confidence, challenge (if we may be allowed the expression) the favour of heaven:—so strong, so prevailing is the power of innocence!—As he has all his life long served, in honesty and simplicity of heart, so good a patron and benefactor, he commits himself to him, who is not only sufficiently able, but has moreover graciously promised to protect and defend the innocent from the storms and tempests of this lower world. The Lord is his refuge in the day of affliction; under the shadow of his wings he can securely shelter himself till these calamities be overpast.

Now, on the other hand, the worldly-minded man, who will not trust himself or his concerns with Almighty Wisdom and Power, but endeavours to make himself considerable in this world, by perversely following his own inventions, such

as God doth not either allow, or approve of; who resigns, as it were, his right and title to the care and protection of the Almighty; such a worldly-minded man, I say, has nothing to support him, and bear up his spirits, when a sea of troubles breaks in upon him. In a time of danger, he is compleatly unhappy, truly wretched; his guilt arms every thing against him, and fills every trivial occurrence with horror and amazement.

THERE is another advantage, and that no inconsiderable one, which the just and upright man hath over the wicked and unjust, namely, that he stands fair to meet with the best treatment from other men, even from the most wicked and ungodly. His unaffected piety, his unshaken integrity, his impartial charity, and, in a word, the extraordinary sweetness of his temper, will strongly plead in his behalf, and preserve him from any act of violence and injustice. He who is thus steady to the most worthy and generous principles, commands the esteem and veneration of all men, and is, for the most part, safe and secure at all times, his very enemies being awed by such conspicuous virtue and goodness. Besides all this, tho' the virtuous man may meet with a thousand vexations and disappointments, in this vale of tears; yet he incurs no real disgrace; no man can with reason either reproach or insult him; whereas, when the projects and machinations of the vicious and abandoned man are frustrated and defeated, every one is pleased at his miscarriage; every one acknowledges the justice of his fall.

WERE there no other motives to prevail with us to preserve our integrity; yet this alone, I should think, might be sufficient:—that an upright man, how miserable soever his outward state and condition may be, is perfectly satisfied
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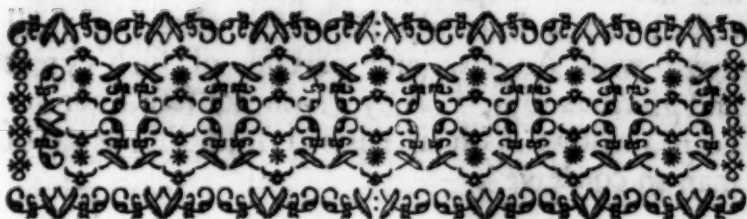
with his own conduct; all is calm and serene within; and when there is most trouble and confusion without, then he experiences more abundantly the joy that flows from innocence and virtue: whereas, on the other hand, when a wicked man is in distress, he has a secret foe within his bosom, and his guilty conscience will fill him with amazing fears and terrors, will rack and torture his soul with inexpressible grief and anguish.— And Oh! how deplorable, how disconsolate must his condition be, when the terrors of the Lord set themselves in battle array against him! When death and hell gape to devour him; when dangers and distractions attend him, and all his hopes are fallen; when his own mind suggests the bitterest things against him; then will the Almighty shew the marks of his high displeasure; then the sense of guilt and shame will double every evil, and add a deadly sting to every outward trouble and distress.

To conclude, whatever dangers we may be exposed to, let us be sure to preserve a good conscience; let us always continue faithful and constant to the dictates of reason and religion, always remembering, that, at the last day, each individual practitioner of guilt and hypocrisy shall be covered with shame and confusion; that all his subtle artifices, whereby he imposed on the world, shall be detected, and all his unworthy projects and wicked schemes be stript of those specious pretences, with which they were glossed over, and the dark counsels of his heart shall be made manifest. At that day, he who has been careful to preserve his integrity, shall lift up his head with joy and confidence, whilst the sinner shall stand

abashed and confounded; the one shall be thrust into that Lake, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is never quenched; and the other be received into a heavenly Paradise, where he shall dwell with Angels, and partake of such great and glorious joys, "as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive".



SUNDAY



SUNDAY XX.

Against Calumny and Detraction.

JAMES I, 26.

If any man among you seem to be religious and bridletb not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.



WHEN God Almighty first created man after his own image, and formed his body with a rational soul, he constituted him his vice-gerent, and gave him an absolute dominion over all his handy-works. But notwithstanding his attendants were numerous enough, he still remained a solitary creature. The dignity of his nature had set him above the converse of mere brutes; and tho' he had a strong propensity to society,

ciety, yet there could not be found a fit companion for him: whereupon, God Almighty, who knew perfectly well the nature of him, whom he had thus dignified and distinguished, caused a deep sleep to fall upon *Adam*, and thereupon took one of his ribs, of which he made *Woman*, and brought her to him for an help-mate, a comforter, and a companion; one, whose soul (as well as body) might correspond with his, and whose heart might answer his, as *in water face answers face*; one, in whom he might repose all his trust and confidence, all his joys and sorrows; one, with whom he might interchange all his ideas and sentiments; and, in a word, one, to whose faithful breast he might with safety entrust his most important secrets.

HOWEVER, tho' the sublime part of them panted for the closest union; yet there was a cloud of flesh which obstructed and opposed it. In order, therefore, to remove this obstacle, the infinite wisdom of God ordained speech, and taught them the use of the tongue, so admirably contrived to manage the most intimate commerce between the rational, yet invisible, powers of human souls, whilst cloathed in flesh.

THO' we have the greatest reason in the world to admire the nature and beauty of this contrivance, and to applaud the extensive benefits arising from it, since from this particular fountain all the advantages of society, all the arts and sciences, and, in short, all the pleasures of life in a manner flow; yet, as 'tis foreign to my purpose to expatiate on the usefulness and excellency of this member, I shall, on the contrary, make it the business of my present discourse, to shew, that this invaluable faculty is too capable of being corrupted, and too often produces the most malignant poisons; that sorrow, bitterness, and death
itself

may be, and sometimes are, the fatal consequences of a too heedless, or sinful indulgence of this unruly member.

AMONG the numberless evils, then, with which the tongue, that world of iniquity, as our Apostle calls it, is fraught, I shall select for the present but one, which, tho' very plain and obvious, may justly be termed, at all times, and almost in all places, the predominant, or reigning vice, I mean detraction, or speaking evil of our neighbour:—a vice, which tho' few or none are perfectly exempt from, yet at the same time 'tis of that deadly nature, that St. *James*, in my text, positively declares, *If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain.*

DETRACTION, in the common acceptance of the term, denotes an endeavour to degrade or depreciate any one in point of his character, and thereby to render him mean and contemptible in the eye of the world. Now this is very justly looked upon as one of the most ungenerous designs, which one man can possibly have upon another. All mankind have naturally a tender regard for their reputation, and to be careless and remiss in so nice a point is deemed a sure mark of a dissingenuous mind. To wound therefore our neighbour secretly, to take from him his good name, can be of no advantage to us, but may make him extremely unhappy. Moreover, it is a flat contradiction to that grand rule of charity—*Love your neighbour as yourself*;—and that which violates at once the sum and substance of the whole second Table of the Law, for so our Saviour renders it, must doubtless be looked upon as a crime of the blackest dye.

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THUS having considered the nature of this enormous vice, it naturally follows, that we should ask the question, whether we may be allowed to speak ill of our neighbour at any time, or on any occasion whatsoever? And the answer is very plain and obvious, that we ought to practise it as little as possible, and then only give way to it, when we can thereby prevent some considerable evil, and procure some important good, either to ourselves, or others. But as so general a rule may prove insufficient, let us descend to particulars, wherein we are warranted to speak evil of others, without being in the least liable to the odious imputation of tale-bearers or calumniators.

FIRST then, it is not only requisite and praiseworthy, but our duty to do this, when there are good grounds to hope, that our reflections may tend to the reformation of the person, on whom they are cast. We may either tell a man of his faults privately, or, if we are not in that degree of intimacy with him, may reveal them to any one whom we shall judge more fit and proper to reprove him; but then we ought to take particular care, that the party to whom we entrust the secret be one, who will make no ill use of such a private intimation; and this will be esteemed so far from a breach of christian charity, that it will appear to be one of the best indications of it; for 'tis very possible, the story you have heard may be utterly false; and if so, the injured person will have an opportunity of vindicating his character, or, if he be in reality guilty, when he is cautioned with privacy and prudence, it may be he will reflect on his misconduct, and reform.

BUT then likewise we ought to take special care, that there be nothing of passion or humour

mour in our reprehensions of such delinquents, and that under pretence of reforming them, we do not tell them of their faults in such a manner, as if we meant to insult and assume a superiority over them, rather than to shew our benevolence and good will towards them. It requires no small degree of dexterity and address to manage the business of reproof in such a manner, as not to irritate, or provoke the party against whom it is levelled, instead of doing him any real service; few men are over-fond of hearing their faults exposed; they are apt to look upon the person who gives them advice, as one that offers a violence to their understanding, as one who is too haughty and over-bearing; and it too often happens, that when we think, by a kind precaution, to gain a valuable friend, we create ourselves an implacable enemy.—There are some, who value themselves upon speaking their minds, as they call it, freely and without reserve; that is, of saying the most rude and ill-natured things they can possibly devise; and whenever they are checked for so doing, they'll readily reply, that plain-dealing and sincerity too often give offence; and that such free and open-hearted men as themselves are too generally made the objects of contempt and ridicule. But give me leave to say, there is as much difference between plain-dealing and rudeness, as between religion and hypocrisy; both wear a mask, tho' one may be more easily, 'tis true, detected than the other.

AGAIN, notwithstanding a good man is very cautious of the reputation of his neighbour, or, in short, would willingly speak ill of no man living; yet 'tis not to be doubted, but that, when he is called upon to give any publick testimony, of what nature or kind soever, in a court of judicature, as the law directs, and out of regard to the solemn oath,

oath he is there obliged to take, he will doubtless declare the whole truth; and in that case, he would be so far from being blame-worthy, that he would be guilty of a most heinous and unpardonable crime, should he conceal the least part of it; for it frequently happens, that a man, by throwing a veil over one person's fault, does an act of injustice to another, nay, proves unjust to the whole community; and then the guilt which he conceals very justly lies at his own door, and he is judged as an accomplice, both in the sight of God and man.

AGAIN, it is lawful, beyond all dispute, to publish the faults of others, in vindication of ourselves. As no law, divine or human, obliges us to love our neighbour better, tho' we are all enjoined to love him as ourselves; so no charity can require us to sacrifice our own good name, or hurt our own reputation, to preserve that of another, or to suffer ourselves to be made beggars, and our families to be distressed, if not absolutely ruined, for the sake of concealing another's misdemeanours. It must be confessed, that where we are but slightly injured, and the consequence of our resenting it would prove fatal to our neighbour, true charity will prompt us to be favourable, and not seek our own with too much severity and rigour: if, however, the case be equal, we are doubtless at liberty to prefer our own interest, and that of our family's to all other considerations whatsoever.—'Tis no crime, 'tis true, to recede from our right, but such a self-denial must be esteemed among the heroic flights of charity, and not as one of her obligatory, or indispensable laws.

ONCE more, it may be lawful to caution a friend, or even a stranger, whom we see inadvertently drawn into loose, idle, wicked, or disorderly company,

company, lest he be infected in his morals, and injured in his character or fortune, by putting trust and confidence in worthless, and insignificant men; but even in this case, we ought to take special care, that we are not deceived ourselves, and do not injure our neighbour's reputation upon slight and trivial grounds: and 'tis our bounden duty to be as careful as possible, that the ill character we give of any one may spread no farther than is absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of the end proposed.

LASTLY, We may innocently, in our ordinary conversation, make mention of that ill of others, which is already as notorious as it can be; the less, however, we indulge ourselves in this practice, the better, tho' it be granted, we do it without any malice or ill intention; for by degrees, we may grow fond of evil reports, and take a secret delight and complacency in them.—I think I have here introduced most of the cases, wherein I conceive it is either necessary, or lawful, to speak evil of our neighbours: and if we could but be prevailed on to confine ourselves within the limits here prescribed, our tongues would be perfectly innocent, and our lives one uninterrupted scene of serenity and ease.

I THINK it will not be improper, after what has been said, to lay before you some of the dangerous consequences of *evil-speaking*, and likewise to remind you, that a propensity to this vice is the most certain sign of an ill-natured and disingenuous frame of mind.

AND in order to set the evil of this practice in the clearest light, let it be remembered, that by the universal consent of mankind, what we deprive our neighbour of, whenever we are guilty
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of this vice of Calumny or Detraction, is of inestimable value, namely, his reputation.

NOR have we only the suffrage of men in this particular, but the attestation of God himself, who frequently in Scripture bears witness of its value, and proposes it as the reward of a virtuous and religious man. *The name of the just shall be blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot,* says the inspired Penman.

THE righteous and just, the candid and ingenious, prefer a good name to riches, titles, or even life itself; their reputations are as dear to them as their very souls; it is indeed an inferior sort of immortality. 'Tis this part of us which blossoms in the grave, and will yield a perfume, when our bodies shall be crumbled into dust.—The consideration whereof so far prevailed with the more generous part of the Heathens, that they chearfully laid down their lives in hopes of rendering their names immortal.

BUT it is needless to look into history, in order to discover the worth of a good name; since every man is sensible, that its value is inestimable. How impatient are we, when our reputations are invaded! What dangers will men not run, to preserve a fair and open character? And when a man's reputation is gone, how readily do we pronounce the loser of it inevitably ruined and undone! Notwithstanding the injury is every way so great, that not only the rash and inconsiderate, but the more sober and cool part of mankind cannot feel themselves wounded in so tender a part, without the utmost warmth and resentment; yet 'tis surprising to think how few there are, who are tender of, or indeed have any regard for, another's reputation. Scandal and Detraction have too generally

nerally been a darling amusement; to compliment such as are present, and to blast the good name of their absent friends, and most intimate acquaintance, is the principal, if not the sole business of some people's lives; and to set the faults and foibles of particular persons in the worst and most odious light, is become a favourite diversion. But give me leave to say, that tho' the generality of mankind may take more delight in listening to scandal, than hearing encomiums on their neighbours, and are secretly pleased with ill reports; yet, for the most part, they have so much justice, on the one hand, as to hate those who propagate them, and so much wit, on the other, as to conclude, that those very persons would do the same by them, in another place, and in other company.

It is by no means an injurious observation, that those who are the most prone to this vice must be either envious or ill-natured; they seldom, if ever, remember what is said in the commendation of others; or at least, if they do, they take particular care, either to be entirely silent on that topic, or to represent it in such a light, as will not greatly redound to the advantage or credit of the person of whom they speak. But upon no account whatever will they let a scandalous story pass; such a tale is ready at all times, and upon all occasions, and what is still more ill-natured and unjust, many times they tell it others, tho' they are conscious to themselves it is false, with this kind and charitable caution, indeed, *That they hope it is not true*:—in the mean time, however, they divulge it abroad, give it their sanction, and leave it to be believed or not, according to the candour and good-nature of those to whom it is related.

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'Tis, doubtless, a great injury to speak the worst that we *know* of our neighbour; but to raise false and scandalous reports of him is an injury beyond all possible reparation, since it too often descends to a man's children; and sometimes the only and best legacy a man can leave his son or daughter is an unblemished reputation. And shall we make no conscience of robbing his innocent offspring of the best part of this small patrimony, of all the respect and kindness that might have been shewn them, if their father's character had not been most unjustly, most inhumanly blasted. Is an injury of this nature a concern to be trifled with?—Surely no:—and therefore the consideration, that this guilt cannot be repented of as it ought, should deter us from the commission of it; for to repent, we ought to make what restitution we can; and tho' to avow that we have injured our neighbour in so tender a part, will perhaps undo us in this world; yet, if we are so hardened as not to repent, it will be our inevitable perdition in the next.

ANOTHER evil which proceeds from scandal is this, that it is always a matter of grief to the person on whom it falls. A good name, as I have before observed, is a very tender affair, and a wound there sinks deep; and as the injured party never treats others in so base and ungenerous a manner himself, he is shocked the more at such barbarous treatment.—However, tho' there are many that will not refrain from Calumny, upon the consideration of the wrong they do to others; yet surely, they would turn from their wickedness, were they but duly to reflect, that they not only run the risque of the future welfare of their precious souls, but of their own reputations at present, which, no doubt, they have some regard for, tho'

tho' they shew no mercy to that of their neighbour. But these unthinking, ungenerous, and mischievous wretches would do well to consider, that whoever defames another, gives at the same time a bad character of himself, even to such as he is most fond of pleasing; for they will certainly conclude, that he speaks of them to others, as he does of others to them; and 'tis surprising, that men should not be aware of this, and dread the consequence. It has sometimes happened, that a rash, unmeaning speech has cost many a man his life, or has been the cause of another's murder. However, should neither of these fatal accidents happen; yet this vice may be attended with great inconveniency; for there are few so weak, but they will find a favourable opportunity, one time or another, of amply revenging a spiteful, and malicious slander. Besides, no quality whatever so much recommends one to the favour and good will of mankind in general, as to be free from this vice: every one covets such a person's friendship, and next to piety towards God, nothing is thought a more significant recommendation of any man, than to assert, that he is very seldom heard to speak ill of any person whomsoever.

How cheap, and yet how agreeable is it, to speak respectfully of one another! A good word is an easy obligation; at least our silence can be no ways prejudicial to us. Some acts of devotion, indeed, are expensive; but to refrain from evil-speaking will cost us nothing. Were we ever so covetous we might surely afford our neighbour this poor pittance, this reasonable regard for his good name.

THERE are few so blameless, as not to be liable to reproach upon some account or other; but suppose they were, is it not an easy matter for a

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man to invent, and spread a story to their disadvantage? And he that has received a wound in his character, will most assuredly endeavour to repay it with usury upon the person that gave it. 'Tis certainly the safest way, to let any scandalous story dye, be it true or false; and sometimes, it may be as great an act of charity, to conceal the evil, which you hear or know of another, as it would be, to relieve him in the utmost distress. Ill-nature is not surely so bewitching a quality, that we should sacrifice our present, as well as future interest, to indulge such a passion. 'Tis mean and pitiful, to spend our breath in so poor a pursuit; 'tis offering, in short, an insult to the dignity of our natures; let us, therefore, pour out our souls in prayers for our brethren, rather than spend our time in needless accusations of them; for both the one and the other will return with interest into our own bosoms.

THO' it may be expected, that I should not pass over in silence what has been alledged by some in favour of *Evil-Speaking*; yet I shall be very short on this article, since there can be but very little urged in defence of so malevolent a practice.

SOME assert, then, that it serves to keep up the spirit of conversation. But suppose we should be hardy enough to grant there is some pleasure to be met with in invective; yet it must be allowed to be but a barbarous one; for what gives another pain can never be a proper entertainment for the good-natured and ingenuous part of mankind; and, observe it when you will, whoever has an unlucky wit, or what is called an happy talent at dressing up a piece of scandal, tho' his companions may possibly applaud his ingenuity; yet they will most assuredly condemn and despise him for the
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the baseness of it. How much better would it be; therefore, for him to employ his genius another way; and instead of propagating scandal, to exert his wit in exposing vice and folly in general, and setting virtue and merit in the fairest and most advantageous light!

SOME pretend, indeed, they have received provocation; if in the same kind, 'tis evident, they feel the smart of it, and are sensible of the injustice; if therefore they do not abstain from it, they sin against conviction. Moreover, let it be remembered, that the Christian religion forbids revenge; and *Solomon* asserts, that a *soft answer turneth away wrath*.

THE most specious plea, however, of all is this, that what is misnamed slander is the most proper punishment for such crimes as do not lie under the cognisance of the law; and some good men are so violently bent upon reformation, that, rather than justice should not overtake the delinquent, they themselves will take the sword in hand, and become the executioners. But let us allow what weight they please to such an argument; yet give me leave to observe, it does not seem a fair and honourable way, to punish one fault by the committing of another; and I am apt to think, that after all we can say, the wicked and unjust, the foolish and inconsiderate, would not fail of being sufficiently mortified for their follies, were we to cast no manner of reflections upon them.

BUT forasmuch as shewing the malignity of a distemper, without attempting to prescribe some cure, is leaving the business half undone, I shall offer a few rules for the prevention of this fatal disease, and so conclude.

NEVER speak evil, then, upon common fame; which for the most part is a liar; consider, likewise,

before you depreiate your neighbour, of the injustice of your defamation; and whether you are not representing him in an unfair and disadvantageous light; for mere humanity should teach us to set a man's good qualities against his bad ones. Should we industriously expose to view all the over-sights and follies of the wisest man that lives, and as industriously conceal his virtues, the man, from this partial representation of him, would make but an odious figure. How very ungenerous this way of treating our neighbour is, every one, upon the least consideration, cannot but be highly sensible. — 'Tis much the same thing, as if we should strike out all the beautiful colourings in a fine piece of painting, and then shew the daubed canvas as the artist's performance.

DID we suppress all vain curiosity and impertinent enquiries about the person, the affairs, and character of others, we should subdue all calumny and detraction, by cutting off its supplies. But 'tis no matter of wonder, whilst busy-bodies and tale-bearers are so well received, that this vice should gain such ground as it really does; and that some should bring themselves to such an unhappy pass, as seemingly to stand as much in need of daily scandal, as of daily bread. Could we, however, once persuade such sort of people to seem at least ignorant of the concerns of their neighbours, I am fully convinced, it would contribute very much towards their ease, happiness, and reputation.

BUT most effectually to deter us from this vice, let us consider, that we must all appear before the judgment-seat of *Christ*, who most severely condemns this ungenerous practice, where he says, *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.*

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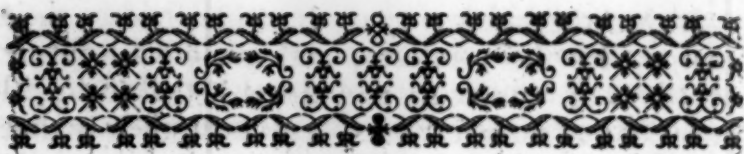
To conclude all, with one word of advice to those, that are, or may be sufferers by men, who, as our text observes, *will not bridle their tongue.*

If then they are guilty of the crime laid to their charge, let them reform, and cut off all future occasions of reproach, and thereby defeat the ill intentions of their enemies, and turn their malice to advantage. But if they are innocent, let them follow the example of our blessed Lord, who, *when he was reviled, reviled not again, but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously.*

AND God of his infinite mercy grant, that our names may never be registered among the number of those, that *bridle not their tongue*, but on the contrary, that our religion may be such a steadfast principle, as may bring us to that eternal glory, which he hath promised, thro' the merits and mediation of his Son *Jesus Christ*, to whom, with the Holy Ghost, be ascribed as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, and power, both now and for evermore. *Amen.*



SUNDAY



SUNDAY XXI.

Prosperity and Pleasures, the Rewards
of the Righteous.

JOB XXXVI, II.

*If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their
days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.*



ELIHU, in this chapter of *Job*, is setting forth the justice and goodness of God, in regard to his dealings with the sons of men in this life, and demonstrating to his hearers, that the righteous man may expect even all kinds of temporal blessings, as a reward for his service and obedience.—*Behold!* says he, *God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom.—He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous; but with*
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kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them forever, and they are exalted. — If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity and their years in pleasures.

THESE words contain a very sensible, and important inducement to a religious life; since there is nothing, for the generality, more powerful and prevailing with mankind than *prosperity*, in the common acceptation of the term; nothing which they more earnestly covet than *pleasure*. — If then it can be made appear, that to *obey and serve the Lord* will contribute greatly towards rendering men successful in their temporal concerns, and cause them to spend their days in pleasures, this may be a strong motive to allure them to the trial of it, and to divert them from the ways of wickedness: for as *Elibu* says, in this chapter of *Job*; *if they obey not, they perish; they die in their youth, and their life is among the unclean; but if they obey, and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity and their years in pleasures.*

If this proposition of *Elibu*, therefore, can be clearly demonstrated, as I trust it may, I cannot see what farther will be wanting to recommend religion to us, as the most effectual means for the gratification of all our passions in this world.

Now, that righteousness doth in reality make the most excellent provisions for every kind of pleasure, will appear, if we consider,

THAT it greatly contributes towards our health, which is the basis, or foundation of all our pleasures: — that it highly augments the *relish* and *sweetness* of our *delights*: — that it secures us from all those *inquietudes*, and *anxieties* of mind which are apt to *imbitter* our pleasures, and make our lives uncomfortable; in short, that it adds to human life a long train

train of pleasures of its own, to which those who are not possessed of it are utter strangers.

A VIRTUOUS deportment so far conduces to our *health* (that blessing so absolutely necessary to our enjoyment of any *sensible good*) that without it, neither *riches*, nor *honours*, nor any thing else that we esteem most valuable, will avail us, or be thought worthy of our regard. Now, that a *sound* and healthy Constitution does greatly depend upon a discreet government and moderation of our appetites and passions, upon a sober and temperate use of all God's creatures (which is an essential part of true religion) is a thing so self-evident, that it would be almost impertinent to labour in the proof of it. — For what are most of our *diseases* and *infirmities*, that make us miserable while we live, that cut us off in the midst of our days, and transmit weakness and rottenness to our *posterity*, but the natural result of our riots and *excesses*, our *wantonness* and luxury? If we would but observe those measures in the gratification of our *passions*, that mean in our *pleasures*, which religion dictates to us, we might doubtless *preserve* our *bodies* to such a degree, as to render the business of the physician almost needless. — But as these things are too well known to be insisted upon; — give me leave to ask you one fair question. — Doth not a life of religion very much heighten the relish and sweetness of all our sensible enjoyments? — Certainly it does. Religion is so far from abridging us of any of our earthly delights, as weak people vainly imagine, that it abundantly augments them. — It doth not only indulge *mankind* in the free use of all those good creatures which God hath made for their support and comfort whilst they are in their earthly bodies; but makes those enjoyments more
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exquisitely delightful than without it they could possibly be.—And this it effects in part, by virtue of that temperance and moderation which we before spoke of; and which never can be too warmly recommended. For thereby it comes to pass, that our senses, which are the instruments of our pleasures, are always preserved in that life and purity which are absolutely necessary for performing their respective functions aright, and rendering our perceptions of any thing agreeable and acceptable to us; whereas the *sensual* and voluptuous man defeats his own designs; for tho' he purposes to enjoy a greater share of pleasure than other men, in reality he enjoys a *less*; — for by his dissolute course of life, and the indulgence of his appetites without controul, he only palls them, and takes off their edge. His insatiable thirst after temporal enjoyments does but render them the more insipid and *unaffected*. — His food is not so savoury; — his recreations are not so entertaining; — his sleep is not so sweet; — neither, in a word, is the company he keeps so agreeable, as that of those, who by following the measures which *nature* and *reason* prescribe, come to them with a truer, and more natural relish. — But beyond this, there is a certain gaiety and *cheerfulness* of mind, which is in a manner *peculiar* to the sincere and unaffected Christian, which above all things sets off his pleasures, and makes all the actions and perceptions of human life amiable and delightful. — No melancholy gloom can ever affect the truly pious man. — Nothing in nature so effectually dispels that heaviness and inactivity, which render the soul of man incapable of enjoying either itself or any thing else, as an unaffected piety. It fills the soul with perpetual *light* and *vigour*, and infuses a wonderful kind of *alacrity*

ty and gaiety of humour into it. And this influence it has over us, not only by the removal of those things that give a check to our mirth, and make us languish in the midst of our festivities, such as are the pangs of a guilty conscience, and the storms and tempests of unruly *passions*; but by the correction and exaltation of our natural dispositions. Those ardent and affectionate breathings, wherewith the pious soul is continually carried out after God and Virtue, are to the body, like so much fresh air, and wholesome-exercise; they circulate the blood, and keep it from settling; they clarify the spirits, and disperse those grosser feculencies which would otherwise cloud our understandings, and make us dull and listless. The exercise of virtue and devotion diffuses itself even to the outward visage of a man, makes his countenance clear and serene, and fills his eyes with an unusual kind of sparkling and vivacity. Certain it is, that piety disposes a man, to a chearfulness of heart above all things in the world; and how exquisite a relish this gives to all our other *pleasures* and *enjoyments*, there is no one but can easily discern.

Religion is likewise a most effectual antidote against all those restless *anxieties* and evil *accidents* which either totally destroy, or imbitter at least (in a great measure) all our sublunary enjoyments. For whilst it directs us to place all our happiness in *God-Almighty* and *ourselves* alone; whilst it instructs us to bring all our affections and passions, our desires and aversions, our hopes and fears, under the regulation of our reason; and whilst we endeavour (being so taught) not so much to adapt matters to our own inclinations, as our inclinations to them, being indifferent to all occurrences that can possibly happen, excepting only, that
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we always deem those things best, which God, in his unerring Providence, thinks most for our advantage: Whilst we are thus disposed, I say, as religion, if it be permitted to have its perfect work upon us, will most certainly thus dispose us, what accident is there in life that can be capable of molesting or interrupting our peace and repose, or creating us the least uneasiness or vexation? Our present enjoyments will not be embittered with the apprehension of losing them, or any ways diminished by our impatient longing after such as are more refined. Our minds will not be discomposed, or upon the rack, for the accomplishment of such things as perhaps are impossible; nor our bodies under the lash of anger in excess, for every trivial disappointment. We shall not look down with an envious eye on our neighbour's good success, nor reflect on ourselves for the want of what he enjoys; nor shall we murmur or repine at the seemingly severe dispensations of Divine Providence, should we be deprived even of those few blessings of which we were once possessed; we shall be enabled to acquiesce, as holy *Job* did, under the afflicting rod of the Almighty, and say with him, *the Lord hath given and hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* But 'tis not thus with the vicious man. His anxieties are as numberless as they are inexpressible. He carries that within him, which will perpetually gaul and torment him; for he is a slave to his passions; and the least of them, when it once gets the ascendancy over him, is the worst of tyrants. He is like the troubled ocean, restless and ever working, ruffled and discomposed with every blast of wind. He is incapable of being rendered even *tolerably happy*, under all the affluence this world can afford him. For having such
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a multitude of impetuous and insatiable appetites, they must all of them be satisfied, or else the man must be miserable: And as there are such an infinite number of circumstances that must concur to the giving them the satisfaction required; and as all these have their dependance on things which are perfectly out of his power, it necessarily follows, that he must continually meet with something to disquiet him, and render his condition restless and uneasy.—A thousand unforeseen accidents will ever be crossing his designs. Nor will there be wanting some little thing or other, almost hourly, to ruffle him, and put him out of humour. And if this be the case of the vicious man, in the most flourishing circumstances of life, where the causes of vexation are in a manner concealed, and not easily to be discerned; in what a deplorable condition must he needs be, when under those more substantial afflictions to which human life is daily exposed?—What is there that shall be capable of supporting his spirits, when under the galling load of a lingering disease, or the anguish of unutterable pain? What will become of all his mirth and festivity, should there happen a severe revolution in his fortune, should he fall into disgrace, should his friends forsake him, or the means of maintaining his grandeur and pleasures fail him; in a word, should he become as much lost in his fortune as his virtue? Will not these evils render him incapable of any consolation, eat into the heart of his most refined enjoyments, and become *gall* and *wormwood* to his most delicious dainties. Has not this man, think you, made a most judicious provision for his pleasures; has he not done himself a singular piece of service, by freeing himself from the *drudgery*, as he call it, of virtue and religion?

gion? Alas! poor man! This is the only thing that would now have secured him from all these sad accidents, these severe mortifications.

ON the other hand, the vicissitudes of fortune, and the incertainty of all sublunary enjoyments, with which other men are continually alarmed, have no influence or effect on the good man. He enjoys a constant serenity, and an uninterrupted peace of mind, amidst the greatest confusion.—Those evils that may be avoided, and a great number which afflict mortal men are really such, —he, by his prudent conduct and wary deportment, wholly prevents;—and those that are unavoidable, he views in such a light, that they have no power to do him any material prejudice. Such a sovereign art he has, that he can improve the worst of accidents that can possibly befall him, so far, that they shall not be accounted his afflictions, but his enjoyments.—The varieties of his condition may occasion, indeed, an alteration in his pleasures, but 'tis beyond their power to diminish, much less to destroy them; and this security he enjoys, not as some of the Stoics of old pretended to do, by an imaginary insensibility, or by a change only of the names of things, calling that no evil, which in reality is one;—but by an absolute resignation of himself to the Will of God, and an hearty acquiescence in his unerring Providence.—He is conscious to himself, that there is a God who governs the world, and that nothing happens to him, but by his special permission and appointment; he is certain, moreover, that this God hath a real affection and concern for him, and would not suffer any accident to befall him, but what in the end should tend to his future benefit and advantage; and these thoughts

thoughts so support his spirits, that he not only bears up with patience under them, but thanks God for every occurrence, being assured, that he knows best what is best for him. Instead of murmuring and repining that his affairs run cross, and don't answer his expectation, he determines with himself, in imitation of the Apostle, that let his station of life be what it will, he will therewith be content.

BESIDES this security from outward disturbances, which our virtue obtains for us, there is another evil which it also delivers us from, with which the wicked man is almost perpetually harrassed and perplexed, and which seldom suffers him to enjoy any sincere, or solid pleasure: I mean, the pangs of a guilty conscience, the fears, the restlessness, the confusion, the horrors, that alternately distract his soul, from the sense of his crimes, and the just apprehensions of the shame and vengeance that attend them, it is possible, in this life, but most assuredly in that which is to come. How happy, how prosperous soever the sinner may be as to his other affairs; yet these furies will eternally haunt him. No pomp or grandeur, no costly entertainments, no noise of company will be able to lull them asleep.—Every man who is wicked, cannot but be conscious that he is so, and that very consciousness is a principle of perpetual anguish and disquietude. Though his crimes be ever so secret; yet he cannot be assured, but that they may one day or other be brought to light: and the very terror of this, makes him feel all the shame and amazement of a present discovery.—But let us suppose, that he hath contrived to sin so closely, or in such a nature, that he need be under no apprehension of future disgrace;

grace ; that the eye of the world could never pry into his actions ; yet can he cease to know ; that there is an offended God, with whom he hath a long and dreadful account to balance and adjust ; a judge of too much equity to be corrupted, too powerful to be over-awed, and too wise to be imposed upon ?—Can any man, think you, under such tormenting reflections as these, be likely to find one single hour of uninterrupted pleasure ? Surely no ;—none can conceive what bitterness of soul is, but he who feels it. To all outward appearance, perhaps, he may seem a favourite of fortune ; and the world may pronounce him happy, may admire and applaud his situation.—But alas ! the world cannot discern the sad cankered heart which he often carries under this gaudy outside ; they know not with what sudden damps his spirit is often struck, even in the height of his enjoyments ; they know not how unquiet, how broken his slumbers, and, how often he starts and looks pale ; darkness to him, is like that horrible visitation, sent to the *Egyptians*, a darkness to be felt ; something of affinity to that which we may suppose the Damned themselves endure in that dismal mansion, reserved for the Devil and his angels.—When he arises from his bed of terror, he may endeavour to stop the clamours of his conscience ;—may think to divert it with business, drown it with rivers of wine, or calm it with the malady of musick ; and sometimes, indeed, he may possibly be so successful as to lull it to sleep :—But alas ! that is no lasting peace ; the least accident can revive it ; even the sound of a passing bell, a clap of thunder, a frightful dream, or a melancholy story, can awaken the poor man to his return of torment.

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Now, be judges yourselves, whether the honest and virtuous man, who is free from all these agonies; who is at peace with God, and has no conscience to accuse him; who apprehends nothing terrible from the former, nor feels any thing that can sting him from the latter, but is safe from himself, and from all the world in his own innocence; be yourselves judges, I say, whether such a one hath not laid a better and surer foundation for pleasures and a happy life, than the man, who, by indulging his lusts and vices, only harbours a snake in his bosom, which will not cease to sting and torment him beyond what any tongue is able to express, or the most artful cruelty can invent.

BUT this is not all; for religion adds to human life a world of pleasures of its own, which vicious men are perfect strangers to.—And these are so excellent in their kind, so delicious, so ravishing, that the highest gratifications of sense are in no degree comparable to them.—'Till we come to be sincerely religious, we never understand what true pleasure is. That which arises from our outward senses, is but a faint shadow, a mere dream, to it. Then do we begin to enjoy true pleasure, when our highest and divinest faculties, which were wholly lulled to sleep while we lived a life of sense, begin to be awakened, and to exercise themselves upon their proper objects; when we become acquainted with God, the fountain of all goodness; when our hearts become sensible of the great love and good will he bears towards us; when we feel the Divine Nature daily more and more working in our souls, displaying itself in the blessed fruits of charity, peaceableness, meekness, humility, purity, devotion,

tion, and all the other graces of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible, but that such a life as this must be a source, or spring of inexpressible joy to him that leads it, and fill the soul with transcendently greater contentment than any thing here on earth can possibly do. For this is the life of God himself; this is the life of the blessed angels who surround his throne; this then must be the life that is most agreeable to our own natures. Whilst we live thus, things go well with us; our souls are in their proper situation; in that state they were framed, and intended to live in: whereas the life of sin is a state of disorder and confusion; a perpetual violence and force upon our natures. Whilst we live thus, we enjoy the pleasures of men; whereas before, when we were under the government of sense, we could pretend to no other satisfaction, than what the brutes enjoy, as well as we. In this state of life, we gratify our highest, our noblest powers, the intellectual appetites of our souls; whereas in the sensual life, the most groveling, the dullest, the most contracted faculties of our souls were only provided for. But 'tis needless, indeed, to carry you out into such speculations as these, when your own sense and experience will ascertain you in this matter, above ten thousand arguments. Do but seriously determine to serve God, if you have never yet done so; do but once try what it is to live up to the precepts of reason, virtue, and religion; and I dare confidently pronounce, that you will, in a very small compass of time, find more joy, more peace, more content, arising in your minds, from the sense, that you have resisted the temptations of evil, and done what was your duty to do, than in an *Age* spent in vanity, and a licentious course of life. I doubt not in the least, but that, after

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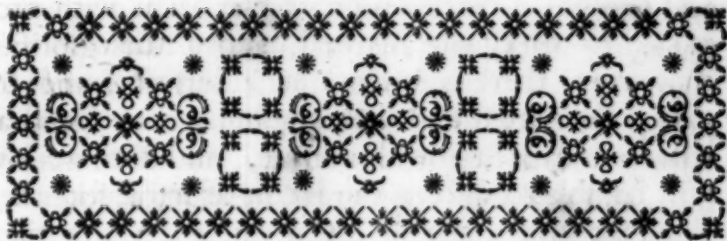
you have once seen and tasted how gracious the Lord is, and how good all his ways are, you will proclaim to all the world, that one day only spent according to the precepts of virtue, is to be preferred to a whole Eternity of sin. You will wonder, that you should have been so strangely abused by false representations of virtue and vice. You will then plainly perceive, that religion is quite unlike what it appeared to you before you became acquainted with it. Instead of that austere, unpleasant countenance, in which you heretofore painted her to yourself, you will then discover nothing in her, but what is infinitely amiable, and all over charms. You will then find those very duties of religion, which at present, seem to you so harsh and irksome, to be accompanied with unspeakable delights. You will not then complain of the narrow bounds, or scanty measures, to which it hath confined your desires ; for you will then find, that you have thereby procured an entrance into a far greater, and more perfect liberty. How abject and spiritless soever it may now look to forgive an injury, or an affront ; you will then find it far more easy, and infinitely more sweet, than to revenge one. You will no longer think works of charity burthensome or expensive ; or that to do good offices to your poor brethren is an employment too mean for you ; for you will then experience, that there is no *sensuality*, like that of doing good ; and that 'tis by far a greater pleasure to do a kindness, than to receive one. How will you chide yourselves for having been so averse to prayer, meditation, and other devotional exercises, when you begin to feel the delightful tranquillity they leave upon your spirits ! You will then confess, that no conversation is half so agreeable, as that which you enjoy with God in prayer ; no cordial so reviving, as a hearty effu-

effusion of your souls unto him. And then to be affected with his mercies ; to praise and give thanks to him for his benefits ; what is it, but a very heaven upon earth ; an anticipation of the joys of eternity ? The very entrance into religion is not without its pleasures ; they are to be found even in your acts of repentance ; even when you mourn and afflict yourselves for your sins ; for such is the nature of that contrition, that holy sorrow, that you would not for all the world, be without it ; and you will most assuredly find far greater contentment and satisfaction in a sincere grief for your transgressions, than ever you did in the commission of them. But what shall I say of the ineffable pleasures that continually spring up in the heart of a good man, from the sense of God's love, the hope of his favour, and the fair prospect he has of the joy and happiness of the other world ? How pleasing, how transporting will the thought be, that he is one of those happy souls, who, of an enemy, is become the friend of God ; that his ways are pleasing to him, that he is not only pardoned, but accepted and beloved by him ! How pleasing will it be to each of you, to think, that such a wretch as you once were, who by your sins had made yourself far worse than nothing, are by the goodness of your Saviour, become so considerable a being, as to be able to give delight to the great Lord of the universe, and to cause joy in heaven among the blessed angels by your repentance ; to think, that God charges his Providence with you, takes care of all your prayers, and provides all things needful for you ; that he will, in his own good time, take you up unto himself, to live in his presence, to all eternity, to be partaker of his glory, to be transport-

ed with his love, to be acquainted with his counsils, to know and be known by angels, archangels, and seraphins; to enjoy a conversation with prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and all the glorified spirits of illustrious men, made perfect; and together with such blessed companions, to spend an happy and a rapturous eternity, in adoring, loving, and praising your great benefactor for these miracles of his mercy. Can there be any pleasure like to this? Can ought in this world raise you into such extacies of joy, as the bare imagination of things like these? Will not glories such as these cause you to look down with scorn and contempt upon all the tinsell'd Gewgaws, and sickly satisfactions that so much engross the attention of the generality of mankind? How empty, how insipid, how flat, how unsatisfactory will the greatest pleasures on earth appear to you in comparison of these divine contentments! You will perpetually rejoice; you will sing praises to your Saviour; you will bless the day you ever became acquainted with him; you will confess him to be the sole source and fountain of all pleasure; and that you never knew what it was to be an *Epicure* indeed, till your admission into the pale of the Christian Church.

To the contemplation of these joys I leave you, and God of his infinite mercy grant, that they may have their due influence on your future behaviour, through the merits of his Son, our blessed Redeemer, to whom, with the Holy Ghost, be ascrib'd, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, and power, both now and for evermore
Amen.

SUNDAY



SUNDAY XXII.

* * The Parable of the Prodigal
* Son.

LUKE XV. 18, 19.

*I will arise, and go to my father, and will say
unto him father, I have sinned against heaven
and before thee,*

*And am no more worthy to be called thy son :
make me as one of thy hired servants.*



HE Parable, from whence our text is taken, is, doubtless, not only as remarkable, but as beautifully devised, as any of those which were delivered by our Blessed Saviour ; and no one allegorical performance of the wisest Pagan philosopher can stand in the least competition with it. 'Tis adorned and beautified

with the most glowing colours; 'tis carried on and conducted with the most profound wisdom; and there is a beautiful order and harmony which runs thro' every part, as well as thro' the whole:—moreover, there is so strict an affinity between the things delineated and their symbols, that the most enlarged capacity will admire, and the weakest will be able to discern the lesson of instruction that lies concealed under so fine a veil.

IN this Parable, we have the miseries, and fatal consequences of intemperance and excess, represented to us with full testimony, and, as it were, with ocular demonstration.—But after our unfeigned sorrow and compassionate regard for the ill conduct and licentiousness of the *Prodigal*; what a secret satisfaction must it be to every truly good and charitable Christian to observe the first dawning of good sense and serious reflection in the *young libertine*! With what good reason, and with what sincerity of heart, does every pious man rejoice at that unfeigned sorrow and contrition of his; at those solemn vows and resolutions of amendment, which are attended, as we are told in the Sacred Scriptures, with expressions of joy and exultation in Heaven itself!

AFTER this, what a lively representation have we of paternal fondness and indulgence! The most prevailing, the most powerful passions of human nature are here drawn in the strongest colours. With what pleasure and attention do we reflect on the readiness of the fond and relenting parent, to take his long-undutiful son into favour again, and to bury in oblivion his past offences! How exuberant is the father's goodness to the *young man* upon his melting into tears, and making his humble submission! How soon is his pardon sealed, even before
he

he has time to make the formal acknowledgment which he proposes in our text, namely, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants.*

THUS having given you a transient idea of the nature and beauty of the Parable, I shall raise the two following practical Observations from it.

I. IN the first place then, 'tis evident, beyond all dispute, that the pleasures of sin, however alluring they may prove for a while, are, sooner or later, attended with the severest stings of conscience, distraction, and remorse. And

II. SECONDLY, That those who fall even into such sins as are of the deepest dye, if they will but strive to recover themselves by a timely repentance, may have good grounds to hope for mercy and forgiveness.

FIRST then, I am to shew, that the pleasures of sin, however alluring they may prove for a while, are, sooner or later, attended with the severest stings of conscience, distraction, and remorse.

WHEN our first parent *Adam* had once transgressed the positive commands of the Almighty; when he had once lost his innocence, by indulging his vicious appetite, and too weakly complying with the repeated solicitations of his fair companion, (notwithstanding every circumstance of life seemed to conspire to his satisfaction) how soon did he run to the thickets to conceal himself, when his Maker called him! What could induce him to shun the Divine Presence, with so much shame

confusion, in the cool of the evening, who knew no such passion at the dawn of the very same day? What could create such a sudden alteration in the manner of his conduct? The change that was thus wrought upon him must, doubtless, proceed from some internal cause; for all without was still the same. He was still in the possession of his terrestrial paradise; still surrounded with all the pleasures of sense. The melody of a thousand little tuneful birds still charmed his ear; the flowers breathed the same ambrosial fragrance as before; the cool and gentle breezes fanned the air, and every thing in nature smiled around him. What then, I say, could prompt him to fly from his indulgent benefactor with such horror and amazement? It was the painful and gloomy result alas! of conscious guilt, and an awful apprehension of being removed from his happy situation, as a just punishment due to his demerits.

AND in like manner, every one of us, when we are once made sensible of the nature and guilt of our transgressions, will, and cannot but be full of dreadful apprehensions, not only with respect to the justice and goodness, the Omniscience and infinite Power, but the grandeur and majesty of that God, in opposition to whose divine injunctions they were presumptuously committed. And he that is so thoroughly convinced of his imprudence and ill-conduct, ought, doubtless, sincerely to be concerned, and with the utmost confusion of face to lament his manifold sins and egregious follies; to condemn himself for acting so disingenuously, and so inconsistent with reason, by giving an unjust provocation to the best of his friends, and creating to himself a most formidable enemy.

AND

AND from hence 'tis manifest how miserable a purchase, how disadvantageous a bargain sin is; for if men will indulge themselves in the commission of it without restraint, the best that can be said of it is this, that how sweet and pleasing soever to a vicious palate the enjoyments of sin may seem to be, they are, in effect, the most deadly poison, and prove at last *bitterness in the belly, and the gall of asps within the bowels*. For God Almighty has in no wise left us without a Monitor of his own indignation and displeasure against our sins, and of the danger we run, if we wilfully persist in a state of impenitence, and are determined to pursue our unlawful pleasures at all adventures. The very conscience which is planted in every man's bosom, is an everlasting Remembrancer, if he will but duly give attention to its secret admonitions. That reason, with which God has endowed the generality of mankind, if they will but abide by her impartial sentence, will be judge between them and him, and give it against them; the checks of their own conscience, unless they are determined to stifle them, are every moment alarming, and urging them, by a sincere repentance, to flee from the wrath to come. The Almighty, therefore, as is evident, has set life and death, good and evil before us: he most graciously invites us to the one, and most compassionately warns us of the other. Such is the very frame of our natural constitutions, that our own hearts are our first accusers, when we comply with those sins which too easily beset us; when the inward sense of our own souls gives us timely intimation of that danger, and those miseries to which we are too visibly exposed; and, at the same time, not only directs us to the most effectual remedy, but
prompts

prompts us to make a speedy application of it, before it be too late: if, therefore, still seeing, we will not see, and still hearing, we will not hear, nor understand, lest we should be converted and healed; our own reason and consciences will bear witness against us at the last day, that we have wilfully rejected the offers of grace and mercy; that we have wronged our own souls; and that we can justly blame no one but ourselves, should we then unhappily stand convicted; since, in effect, damnation is the portion which we ourselves have chosen to inherit.

I PROCEED now, in the second place, to shew, from what is suggested by the example in the text, that those who fall even into such sins as are of the deepest dye, if they will but strive to recover themselves by a timely repentance, may have good grounds to hope for mercy and forgiveness.

EVERY man, indeed, should make it his principal care and concern to avoid all notorious crimes, such as cannot be committed but in direct opposition to the dictates of his own conscience, because they leave the sinner in an open way to proceed without controul, from one evil practice to another, 'till he hath filled up' the measure of his iniquity. This is demonstrable from the swift progress which the *Prodigal* made in wickedness, after he was once engaged in the pleasures of sin, and gave a loose to all his sensual appetites without the least restraint: nor did he see thro' his folly, till he was drove to the last extremity, and wanted not only the conveniencies, but the common necessities of life. Men ought, therefore, to keep a strict guard over their hearts, and use their utmost endeavours to keep clear of all such flagrant offences, because they are attended with

with worse and more fatal consequences, than can well be imagined. And if any one, like our *young Libertine*, should be so unhappy as to fall into all, or any of the temptations which he did, and should be overpowered by them, he should consider, before it be too late, that he stands on a very dangerous precipice, and that, if he should dare to proceed, his ruin is unavoidable. For which reason, he must strive with all his might, to deliver his soul from the snare, whilst 'tis in his power, or otherwise he will find himself chained down to the oar, and obliged to do all the drudgery that the Devil, his task-master, shall think proper to impose upon him.

THIS will be the fatal effects of a confirmed habit in any known and presumptuous sin. But of all the vices to which the young and unthinking are addicted, that of leud company is the most dangerous. There is no sin whatever that disarms a man so soon, or throws him at a greater distance from the influences of Divine Grace: *Solomon* gives us a very lively image of the misery and slavery of such a *Prodigal*, who was caught in the toils of an artful prostitute. *He goeth after her*, says he, *as an ox to the slaughter; or, as a fool to the correction of the stocks, 'till a dart strike thro' his liver;— as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth noe that it is for his life.* His folly and reproach, his loss of health, and the waste of his substance, the afflicting cares of the most tender and indulgent parents, the earnest solicitations of the most affectionate friends, have no power or influence over him. He gratifies every appetite without controul, is as insensible as a brute, and wilfully blind, till he sees himself ruined beyond recovery. And then, at the last, he begins to mourn; and
happy

happy it is for him, if he ever begins, when his flesh and body are consuming, and perhaps too, when he is just sinking into his silent grave. Then, indeed, with a sigh, he expostulates with himself, in the following pathetic manner. "How
 " have I hated Instruction, and how has my
 " heart despised reproof! O! that I had obeyed
 " the voice of my teachers, and inclined mine
 " ear to them that instructed me! I was almost
 " in all evil, in the midst of the congregation
 " and assembly." And true, beyond all contradiction, it is, that such as give a loose to criminal engagements, find themselves sooner or later involved in all manner of inconveniencies, to their lasting infamy and reproach. And therefore, the caution given us by the wise man, is not only applicable in this sense, but that which is worse than this. *Let not thine heart incline to her ways. Go not astray in her paths; for she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to Hell, going down to the chambers of death.*

HE, therefore, that would keep himself innocent, and free from the most flagrant and enormous offences, must give a check to the violence of this furious passion, which hurries a man headlong he knows not whither. However, though a man cannot possibly take fire into his bosom without being burnt, in some greater or less degree; yet 'tis possible for him to shake it out again, and by that means, prevent his being absolutely consumed. And this is a duty incumbent on every one to do, who has followed too closely the steps of the *Prodigal* in our text. Let us then, upon the first apprehension of guilt, endeavour to break the bonds asunder, before the habit is grown too strong

strong to be conquered, and the Spirit of God too much grieved to aid and assist us. To this end, we ought to break away at once from such destructive company, and renounce all further converse or acquaintance with them. We should retire within ourselves, we should mortify our bodies, and subdue our passions, by daily fastings, and other wholesome severities, 'till by prayer and supplication, we have drove the unclean spirit out of our souls: but above all, we should humble ourselves in the sight of the Almighty, by the confession of our sins with a lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; we should be earnest and importunate with him, for a full and free remission of our past offences, and for a sufficient supply of his heavenly grace, to enable us to resist and overcome all temptations of the like nature for the time to come; we should preserve in our minds such a strong and lively sense of all our former transgressions, as may always fill us with a jealous fear, and a careful vigilance over our future conduct, and by that means, effectually secure ourselves from falling into the same snare; and with these promising symptoms of a sincere sorrow and contrition for our sins, and a firm and steady resolution to amend our lives, even at the worst, we may have some comfortable assurance of being taken into favour, and having all our transgressions blotted out and buried in oblivion.

And we have, indeed, an express encouragement for this hope, from the case of king *David*, recorded in the *Old Testament*, as well as from the warm reception of the *Prodigal* upon his humiliation in the Parable before us. For when *David*, (upon a due sense of the aggravation of his sins, said

said unto *Nathan*) *I have sinned against the Lord*; the Prophet said unto the Royal penitent (lest he should be overwhelmed with grief, and despair of forgiveness) *the Lord also hath put away thy sin: Thou shalt not die.* However, it must be supposed, that *David's* pardon was not thus signed upon very easy terms, but that the depth of his sorrow and contrition was in some measure proportioned to the enormous quality of his complicated crimes. And by his own account, we find, that the completion of his repentance cost him abundance of prayers, a whole flood of tears, and an infinite number of gloomy apprehensions. In some of his penitential Psalms, he expresses the warmest passions, and emotions of one, whose spirit was almost broken, and just sinking under the weight of a heavy load of guilt, and yet seeking for rest in the sure and certain hope of mercy and acceptance upon his thorough reformation and earnest endeavours of amendment.

AND now, since there is no one so holy and good, as to be pure in the sight of God; and since the most enormous offender may, by a sincere repentance, meet with favour and acceptance; I shall conclude this discourse with a word or two of exhortation.

LET none of us be so obstinate and imprudent, as to run into the riots and excesses of our wanton *Prodigal* in the text, and copy that part of his conduct which ought to be avoided: neither, if we have been guilty of the like acts of madness and folly, let us decline that other part, wherein his example is set before us for our improvement and imitation. Let us be sure, however, to repent, with the same demonstrations of sincerity, with the same testimonies of an inward dread, and
secret

secret horror of our guilt, with the same pious resolutions to accept of the meanest post in our incensed father's house, and to have a constant guard on our behaviour for the future. By such an innocent deportment, such an utter detestation and abhorrence of our former follies, we may be encouraged to cherish a well-grounded hope of having our sins covered, and the stain of them blotted out in the day of the Lord Jesus.

LET us exhort one another to reflect seriously on the infirmities of our frail natures, and make our humble applications to the Almighty for his gracious assistance. *Lord, what is man!* How capable is he of acting against the dictates of his own conscience! What is reason, when blinded by passion! What is sinful flesh and blood, when under temptation! What is nature, unassisted by grace! *Do thou be our keeper and our guide; and prevent us, O Lord, from falling.* Desert us not, though we should go astray, and by our sins and follies put ourselves out of thy divine protection. Do thou restore us, when, by our wilful blindness, we run into temptation, and enable us to walk in thy ways; do thou awaken us, when we are indulging ourselves in ease and sensual security; and when our hearts are too much hardened, through a stubborn habit of sin, do thou mollify them into repentance by such methods as thy Holy Spirit shall think most convenient; since, if we will but purify ourselves, and make us clean; if we will but put away the evil of our doings from before our eyes; if we will cease to do evil, and learn to do that which is just and honourable; we have thy most gracious promise, *that though our sins be as scarlet; yet shall they be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall*

shall be as the finest wool : and though our offences may be as numerous as the sands on the sea-shore, yet if we will but turn away from the wickedness we have committed, we shall save our souls alive.

WHICH that we may all do, God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merit and mediation of his ever blessed Son Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all honour and power, might, majesty, and dominion, now and for evermore. *Amen.*



SUNDAY



SUNDAY XXIII.

 The Sin and Folly of prophane Swearing.

PROVERBS XVIII 21.

Death and Life are in the Power of the Tongue.



BEHOLD how great a matter a little fire kindleth ! The tongue is a fire; a world of iniquity; a world indeed, if such its power. How dangerous a weapon then is this little member ! And how nice and critical, as well as important an affair must be the conduct and regulation of it ! If the issues of life and death are from thence, we ought to look well to it, to see that the current be restrained to its proper channel ; that nothing flow from thence, but what may tend to the fairest issue, and end in life, immortality, and happiness.

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BUT

BUT is it possible, that so much can depend upon the tongue? Are words so pregnant with happiness, or misery? Words, which are but a breath of transient air? True, yet *by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*

BUT let us come to a closer examination of the matter. Let us enquire how this mighty power came to be lodged in this little instrument, the tongue, and in what sense, and how far it is evidently resident in it. Let us see what are the usual offices and employments of the tongue. The avowed office of this useful and significant member of the human frame is, to express the conceptions of the brain, and its employment takes in the whole extent of language; comprehending at once praise and obloquy, worship and execration, mirth and sorrow, harmony and discord. Therewith bless we God, even the Father of all things, and therewith curse we men, who are made after the similitude of that God. Therewith may we, on the one hand, make confession unto salvation, and on the other, *defile our whole body, and inflame, or set on fire the whole course of nature.* And in all this, it is supposed to act under the influence of the heart; and in the worst cases, I believe, it generally does. External expressions of virtuous and pious sentiments cannot be always depended on for their truth and sincerity. Men may think it necessary to make an appearance of good qualities, of which they are not, in reality, possessed. But the care must be widely different on the opposite side of the question. There is no end to be served in a man's appearing worse than he is, and the rancour of the heart will ever be considered as the probable source and fountain of the malediction of the tongue. *Thus are death and life (as says Solomon) in the power of the tongue;*

tongue; for, on the very same principle, that men shall give account of, and consequently receive the equitable punishment for every idle word they shall speak; they shall also, receive the applause and reward that is due to a just and proper regulation of speech; and by their words be justified, as well as condemned.

WITH what apparent view, for what evident purpose, was this instrument of speech made a part of the human fabrick? Why physically speaking, to enable man to express his wants, to acquaint his fellow-animals with the otherwise illegible characters of his heart; and, in a word, to render him a conversible and sociable creature. But with respect to moral and religious ends, there were much higher and more noble views. Let the son of *Sirach* instruct us in them; *The Lord hath given me a tongue, and I will praise him therewith.* The first principal view of the creation of man, of his being endowed with such high and noble faculties, such peculiar excellencies, was, doubtless, the glory of the Supreme Creator. Man is the offspring of ineffable goodness. Every faculty he enjoys is the donation of unbounded benevolence. Will not this suggest to him, that the proper and natural employment of those faculties is to give glory, and honour, and thanksgiving to that Being from whom they are derived?

WHAT then are we to say to such persons as pervert those very powers which were given them for the best and noblest, to the worst and vilest of purposes; who employ that tongue to blaspheme, and dishonour that Being whom it was given them to praise; to confuse, and destroy that society which they were formed on purpose to support and adorn? Is not this putting the most

glaring affront on the Author of our being? Is not this perverting the course and order of nature in the most gross and palpable manner? Is not this, in short, opposing and thwarting the express views of Providence, and destroying the apparent end, and design of our creation? What shall be done unto thee, O thou false tongue? False in the truest, and most extensive latitude; false to all views, social, moral, or religious; and false to thy friend, thy father, and thy benefactor. What shall be done unto thee? — Even mighty, and sharp arrows, and hot burning coals, shall be the fatal, but just reward of thy perjury.

Who are they that have done this great wickedness? Is this to be asked, when our streets are filled with cursing and blasphemy; when execrations and oaths intrude themselves into every article of discourse; when they become the most considerable part of every general conversation; when even our infants and women become remarkable; remarkable, by the worst brand of infamy, for a shocking proficiency in the language and discourse of Devils?

I know not whether those who are addicted to this pernicious vice in any degree are at all to be argued with upon the principle of reason and religion. Surely not the latter. The rule by which any practice stands so solemnly condemned must certainly be disallowed before the practice can become so general. And if that be the case, then farewell reason too. The connexion is so close between those inseparable friends, that *human*, nay, I scruple not to add *divine* power is too weak to disengage them.

BUT as it is to be hoped, there are but few such; and that the practice of that pernicious vice of common

mon swearing and cursing is more generally owing to the want of duly considering, or perhaps of rightly understanding, the heinous nature and fatal consequences of it; I shall, therefore, proceed to lay before you a few of the most obvious, and most conclusive arguments, which may be urged against it, from the respective considerations both of reason and religion.

WITH respect to the latter, certain it is, that nothing can be more forcibly prohibited, more formally condemned, or more solemnly denounced against, thro' the whole system at least of the Christian Law. The author of it has expressly forbid us to swear at all by any kind of object either in heaven or on earth; not even by our own heads; how much less then by the great and venerable name of that tremendous Being, who first formed, and who upholds all things! If the inanimate heavens are not to be called upon thus vainly, because they are his throne; if to the very senseless earth we owe this solemn reverence, because it is his footstool; how dreadful a prophanation must it be, to invoke the sacred name of the great King himself from whom alone both throne and footstool receive their sanctity! So great stress is laid upon it by the Apostle, that he commands it to be avoided even above all things. *Above all things, my brethren, swear not.* And of so much importance is the government of the tongue, considered by him in another place, that he scruples not to pronounce it entirely destructive to all religion, and absolutely incompatible with the essential qualifications of a true and sincere Christian. *If any man among you seemeth to be religious, that is, profess a belief of the doctrines, and a regard to the rules of the Gospel; yet, if that man bridle not his tongue, but be licenti-*

ous and extravagant in his Speech, launching out into oaths, execrations, and blasphemies; depend upon it, those professions are insincere. What little appearances he makes of religion are vain, and what hopes and expectations he may form from it vain, absurd, groundless, delusive, and deceitful. As for curses, how ill do they become the mouth of him who professes himself a disciple of the meek and benevolent *Jesus*, whose doctrine and whose life breathe nothing but love and blessing! Whose example forbids us, *being reviled, to revile again*; being insulted, to threaten; and whose repeated precepts positively enjoin blessings, even in return for curses received; and prayers, for spiteful and injurious treatment. Even under the Law, it had been long since expressly forbidden to take the name of the Lord in vain, and a severe vengeance was denounced against such as should be hardy enough to violate the precept. *Hosea* ranks the swearer with the atheist, the thief, the murderer, and the adulterer. *Use not thy mouth to intemperate swearing*; (says the son of *Syrach*) *for therein is the word of sin*. And again, the talk of him who sweareth much maketh one's hair to stand an end; and the brawls of such make men stop their ears. But it were needless to multiply proofs, that the practice of common and prophane swearing and cursing is wholly indefensible on the side of religion. If there be force in words, nothing is more expressly, or more solemnly prohibited. And what can be expected from the open violation of those repeated prohibitions, but the punishment annexed to such offence; the vengeance particularly denounced against such glaring and palpable affronts upon the Supreme Governour, and Legislator? *The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain*. And in what

what degree of guilt he shall be held, let the holy Psalmist in some measure instruct us. "As he loved
 " cursing, so shall it come unto him. As he de-
 " lighted not in blessing, so shall it be far from
 " him. As he cloathed himself with cursing, like
 " as with a garment, so shall it come to his bow-
 " els like water, and like oil into his bones. It
 " shall be unto him as the garment which covereth
 " him, and for a girdle wherewith he is girded
 " continually." Thus we see the imprecations of
 the curser, whether they be levelled at himself or
 not (as they frequently indeed are) will still retort
 upon himself in their fullest influence. " His
 " mischief shall return upon his own head, and
 " his violent dealing shall come down upon his
 " own pate."

Hear how aptly this is confirmed by the son of
Sirach. A man who useth much swearing, saith he,
shall be filled with iniquity, and the plague shall never
depart from his house. If he shall offend, his sin shall
be upon him, and if he acknowledge not his sin, he ma-
keth a double offence, and if he swear in vain, he shall
not be innocent, but his house shall be full of calamities.
This is the word which is cloathed about with death.

Were we even destitute of these frequent, ex-
 press, and solemn cautions against prophaning the
 sacred name of God, surely reason must inform
 us, that we cannot be guilty of a more audacious
 affront to the Supreme Being, than to invoke him
 on every the most trivial and impertinent occasion,
 or to sport with the great, and awful character of
 him who gave being to all worlds. And how im-
 mensely does it exaggerate this guilt, if that sacred
 authority be appealed, that inviolable name be
 prostituted to the attestation of the most impudent
 and daring falsehoods? And that this is too general-

ly the case with common swearers need not, I think, be observed to you; nor will they themselves, if they have the least sense of shame or modesty remaining in them, dare to deny it.

THIS vice of common swearing then is, in the first place, by an apparent violation of his express commands, most provoking to the Supreme Being. But do we provoke God? What motive have we for it? Hath he ever-injured us? On the contrary, are we not the creatures of his bounty? Do we not depend upon him for life, and all things which pertain unto it? Doth he not dispense unto us the various blessings of nature and fortune with a most bountiful hand? What encouragement have we to it? Are we stronger than he? Can we over-rule his just resentments? Can we ward off the stroke of vengeance?—The swearer then in this respect stands doubly convicted of folly, and ingratitude. Of ingratitude to his best and constant benefactor; of folly, in regard to himself, by exposing himself to ills which he knows not how either to avoid, or to endure.

But secondly, it is injurious to men, not only to those individuals who are the particular objects of his curses and execrations, but even to society in general; *because of swearing, the land mourneth*, saith the Prophet. The sin is of so deep a dye, as to occasion national visitations, by sword, by famine, or pestilence. He, therefore, whose crimes are so flagrant as to bring on public vengeance, is a bane and pest to society, a public enemy, a traitor to his country, and ought to be treated as such. After this consideration, it is needless to mention the comparatively trivial guilt of indecency. When a man has done his endeavour to destroy the peace of his country, 'tis nothing to say, that he

he wounds the ear of every rational and religious Christian, that he destroys the peace of every good man, and puts the grossest affront upon his understanding, by entertaining him with the language and conversation of Devils.

SUPPOSE we were to ask the swearer, what possible pleas can you urge in support of this shocking and abominable practice? I'm afraid we must not expect from him any rational, or satisfactory answer. For will he pretend views of profit and worldly advantage? Who ever heard of wealth, honour, or reputation thus acquired? 'Tis true, in cases of direct perjury, something of this kind may be often the consequence; but the common swearer has nothing to do with this. And few, I believe, will pretend to say, that they have ever made a friend, procured a legacy, inheritance, place, pension, or donation, because they were remarkable proficient in blasphemy. On the contrary, this argument lies strong against him in more respects than one; for it is not only repugnant to the Laws of God, but provided by our Laws, that all offences of this nature shall be punished with a pecuniary mulct. *And I hope a man will not say he gets any thing by that, but poverty, as well as infamy.* It is natural, however, for all sober-minded men, (and such one would willingly hope, will always compose the majority) to avoid commerce and dealings with a man of that character, on that very account. The necessary consequence of which must be, that the advantages arising from his particular trade or calling must be proportionably lessened. Thus much for profit.—For honour, the portion which comes to his share is to be ranked in the most abject and lowest class, among the very dregs and outcast of the people.

Is fame and reputation his view? Here perhaps he may succeed better; but yet he must wait a while for his harvest, till he be received into that society where alone he can find fit companions for him, and where it may be considered as some kind of excellency perhaps (such a one as it is) to be most a Devil, and to come nearest the grand pattern of blasphemy, and impiety. Perhaps the swearer may imagine, that oaths give grace and spirit to his discourse, and to himself the character of courage and vivacity. Who are to be his judges? The sensible part of mankind, who have the best right to that office, he must not appeal to, the abandoned themselves dare not publicly side with him, were they ever so much inclinable by opinion, which I am verily persuaded they are not. The only critics, like to favour him on this occasion, seem to be the inhabitants of a certain region, where blasphemy is probably the reigning wit. But let him enjoy the applause of Devils unenvy'd; few will grudge him his admirers, who consider, that every peal of laughter thus raised will cost him a groan in Hell, and the mirth which is to succeed it, shall consist in weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

I WILL not suppose, that there can be a wretch abandoned enough to assert a pleasure, a self-satisfaction, in common swearing, in blaspheming the sacred name of the great God, in violating positive ordinances, as well human as divine. Sure Devils themselves cannot derive agreeable sensations from so shocking a practice. In short, in every light it can be viewed; on all possible considerations, common swearing is the most irrational, the most indefensible vice, with the least to say for itself of any in the whole catalogue of human frailties.

ties. For it exposes a man to the hearty contempt and abhorrence of every honest Christian, to the present loss of his property by the penal statutes, if the sober part of mankind can but be persuaded to have spirit enough to put them in force; and to the certain loss of all that is truly valuable, eternal happiness hereafter, from the just resentments of an injured God, without the least trifle in the world in exchange for them, without the possibility of attaining one single grain of either pleasure, honour, profit, or any other useful acquisition by the bargain.

It has not even the common pleas of other vices to be urged in its behalf. There are several crimes which a man may with some little appearance of reason at least charge upon nature; but here, every thing of that kind is out of the question, and neither constitution nor appetite will stand him in any stead. For sure a man will not think of saying, that he has a constitutional propensity to blaspheme, as the prodigal, the miser, the wanton &c, may urge for their respective failings, or an appetite to swear, as the glutton avows to the delights of the throat and palate; perhaps every syllable he can possibly urge in his excuse (for defence I will not call it) may be reduced to these three pleas; passion, habit, and inadvertency; but I would not have him build much upon either of them. For, in the first place, whatever is in itself absolutely evil and unwarrantable can never sanctify, or excuse what results from it. A man swears because he is in a passion. But why is he in a passion? Does he not know, that intemperate anger is itself almost one of the greatest faults a man can be guilty of? Does he not know, that it stands expressly forbidden by the letter of the Scripture,
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which tells him he must be slow to wrath, that furious anger was not made for him who is born of a woman?—That he should be angry and sin not. Does he not know, that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God? Will a man then swear because he is in a passion, when he is absolutely forbid ever to be in a passion? And one great reason of that prohibition is on this very account; lest he should be tempted to blaspheme, and to take the name of his God in vain. If a man says, he swears by dint of habit, this is making the case ten times worse; for an habitual custom of sinning is surely in a greater degree of guilt than an occasional lapse. But how did he acquire that habit? Was it not by an apparent failure in his duty both to God and man? But be this habit ever so strong, he must shake it off; reason as well as religion requires it; nay his own safety demands it of him; unless he has a mind to experience the truth of another necessary deduction, and to run without farther thought into eternal damnation, because he has got a habit of deserving it.

EVEN inadvertency will not serve his turn: when a man thinks it a sufficient excuse for his servant having neglected his business, that he tells him it was owing to his not once troubling his head about his directions, then may he also himself be allowed to urge the plea of inadvertency for swearing, and taking God's name in vain, in open contempt of the most solemn, most express, and frequent commands to the contrary.

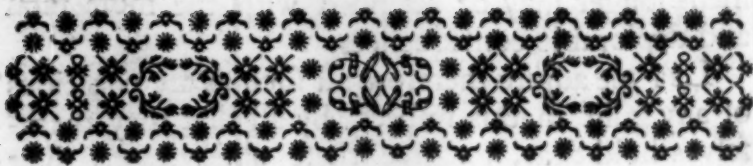
You see then how the affair stands, without the least counter-balance of profit or pleasure either present or future; the certain gain may be resolved into contempt, ignominy, and perhaps poverty *here*, *chains* and *darkness*, vengeance and eternal misery *here*—

hereafter. 'Tis not too late for the most desperate to retrieve himself; but for him who is a blasphemer of yesterday, to persist in it but one moment longer may be attended with the most fatal and deplorable consequences.

LET me adjure therefore all such as are conscious of any guilt in this respect, by all that they themselves hold dear, to give these observations their due force; not to look on my affectionate remonstrances on this head as a matter of course only, but the effect of a real and sincere concern for their present and future well-being.

AND tho' I would, if possible, hope, that we shall meet with but few occasions to employ it; yet I must not omit to desire the hearty concurrence of all sober-minded persons in endeavouring to suppress this horrid and pernicious vice, by applying another and more effectual kind of arguments to such perverse, obstinate and wicked wretches as shall be deaf to these. You see what power the legislature has put into our hands; let every one of us resolve to use it to the utmost on every occasion which may offer for the glory of God and the good of our fellow-creatures. Oh, that there were indeed such a spirit in us all, tho' we were to slay every one his man, who should join to *Baal-peor*, that the iniquity might be done away from among the congregation! For on those terms only will the Lord return unto his wonted displays of mercy and indulgence, and the plague be stayed from *Israel*.





SUNDAY XXIV.

Against profane Cursing and Swearing.

EXODUS XX, 7.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain ; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.



S the subject-matter of the subsequent discourse is so obvious to every hearer, I am in some doubt, whether I shall be able or not, to engage your attention ; I must take leave, however, to tell you, that I have been induced to enter upon this topick, from being an ear-witness, almost every day, of the horrid and impious, not to say blasphemous expressions, that are uttered in the streets ; and to speak freely, the evil, for what I can perceive, seems

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seems daily to grow stronger and stronger, and I have with grief observed, even children, lisping out curses, not only upon their companions, but themselves. Such infants, doubtless, are ignorant of their danger, and for that reason, the less to be blamed; but then, no punishment, in my opinion, can be inflicted on their impious, wretched, and abandoned parents, that, with Justice, can be deemed too severe. I am fully convinced, that prophane swearing is the inlet to every other vice. When men have once set aside a due and awful veneration for the Supreme Being, they are prepared for all manner of wickedness, and any temptation how weak soever, is strong enough to draw them into the Devil's service. (a)

'Tis with pleasure I can observe, that swearing in any polite company, is now looked upon as such a breach of good manners, that the man who dares to be guilty of it, is sure to be despised and avoided. As the lower sort of the people, are very apt to take pattern by their superiors in their vices; I wish we could persuade them to copy their virtues too, especially in the article before

(a) The ill consequences of this vice are so glaring, that notwithstanding we have long had good and wholesome laws in force, for the restraint of this shameful licentiousness of the tongue, yet the legislature have re-considered, and given a check to this impious practice, by new, and 'tis to be hoped, more effectual laws than have hitherto been formed for that purpose; and I believe, nay, am sure it must be the wish of every sincere Christian, that they may be rigorously put in execution. What those penalties are which the law inflicts, is not properly our province; but since this evil is grown so epidemical, as to stand in further need of the aid and assistance of the legislature, to prevent the contagion from spreading farther, it is a convincing proof to me, at least, that it is the duty of the Clergy to resume the topic, though it has already been handled very judiciously by a number of great preachers.

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us ; for we must despair of ever seeing the least signs of a reformation, whilst this vice is so infectious, and so universal. The dangers into which our growing sins and iniquities may involve us, is an argument of too nice a nature to affect such as are most addicted to this vice of swearing ; because, indeed, vengeance does not always overtake the sinner in the commission of his crime. I shall wave, therefore, all considerations of that kind, and seek out for such as may make, if possible, some impressions on the minds of this abandoned crew. But alas ! how few of these dissolute wretches are there that attend the church at all, and for that reason, are within the reach of our reproof ! So, that at least, we must leave them to be punished, in such a manner as the law directs, and I doubt not, were a few of the most notorious but to be taken proper notice of by the magistrates, it would have a good effect upon the rest ; and I must take the liberty to say, that 'tis high time for the magistrates to exert themselves in this matter, since there are some grown so hardened in their impudence and wickedness, as to swear not only in the hearing, but in the very face of those who have a proper power to punish them ; however, what connivance soever may be given to a crime of so pernicious a nature as we are treating of ; 'tis, doubtless, a duty incumbent on us, to level our discourses at such crimes as are found to be the bane of society, and the destruction of our most holy religion, that no one unhappy member may be lost, for want of our endeavours. What regards the lower rank of people, is doubtless a proper subject for the pulpit ; they have immortal souls as well as their superiors, and stand in need of all the helps that can be given,

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to preserve them from falling into the snares of sin and Satan; for some of those few who do attend the public worship, have no other opportunities of information, than what they receive in our churches. As for those who have had the happiness of a liberal education, tho' our discourses may sometimes seem levelled at them; yet 'tis only to remind them of those duties which they cannot but know as well as ourselves, and by our exposing vice and immorality in so public a manner, to make them blush at the commission of it.— But to return to our subject. What can our preaching avail, or our telling men the dangers which they run of eternal damnation, when upon every trivial occasion, nay, upon no occasion at all, they will impiously call on the Almighty to damn and destroy them. There is no one sure who has the least fear of God before his eyes, but must be struck with horror and amazement, and be cut to the heart at hearing such repeated prophanations! one would imagine, that these impious wretches should tremble at the thoughts of death, since they can expect nothing but the wrath of an offended God for their portion. 'Tis what they have called on him to inflict upon them ten thousand times over, and he who cannot lie, has assured them, that their wicked wishes shall be fulfilled; for, *he will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

ALL mankind have infinite obligations to Almighty God; and every moment we live is a fresh monument of his mercy. Whenever he withdraws his protection from us, we fall into numberless evils, and death itself. Since then, 'tis by his permission and goodness alone that we live, move, and have our being, what can be more

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impious than to employ almost every moment of that time in oaths and curses, which ought to be spent in praises and thanksgivings? We profess to believe, that God knows the secrets of our hearts, that nothing is hid from his all-searching eye, that he has power to punish us with eternal torments, that the end of disobedience is certain death, and that he can destroy, if he pleases, the whole world in one moment; that we daily deserve his wrath by casual sins, that he could sink us instantaneously to the lowest pit of destruction, and that should we die without a hearty and sincere repentance, we shall suffer unutterable torments to all eternity. O tremendous thought! to be eternally in pain, to spend millions and millions of years in unquenchable fire, and to have no hopes of redemption, to have a prospect of Heaven, and yet to find it barred forever against us! What heart can bear so much as to think of eternal misery? And yet, how many are there, who, though they profess to believe these certain truths, run the risk of losing their precious and immortal souls, by indulging themselves in this provoking sin? For surely, to make use of the sacred name of God upon every idle, insignificant occasion, is to treat it with the utmost indignity, and by consequence, the surest means to draw down the divine vengeance on their heads. An oath has in all nations, been esteemed so sacred, that many have chose rather to die than break so awful an institution. And indeed, how can our lives, our estates, our properties be secured any other way? To make that cheap therefore, and of no force, is to break at once all trust and converse among men; every one would prey upon his neighbour. He that lightly esteems an oath,
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ought not to live. What measures then can we take with a common swearer? He daily convinces us, that the name of God is of no esteem with him; for the Majesty of Heaven, is prostituted by him to the vilest purposes; he calls the great God to witness every trifle; whether truth or falsehood, 'tis much the same to him; his oaths are always ready. What tie, what obligation then is solemn enough to bind him? None that I know of; all the remedy we have is, to trust such a man as little as possible, to contemn, to detest, to abhor him, to look upon him, in short, as the bane of society.

I AM surpris'd, that any one who professes, and calls himself a Christian, can be guilty of this fruitless sin, which is so directly repugnant to the express command of our blessed Saviour; for Christianity teaches us to be so just and sincere, as that the bare assertion, or denial of a thing may be sufficient. Can a man then possibly take a more effectual course to shew he is no disciple of Christ, than by habituating himself to cursing and swearing? Can any thing be a greater disservice to the cause of religion, than for such as are notorious for this vice, to frequent any Christian assemblies? Is it not a dishonour to our profession, nay, a flat contradiction to it? Does it not rather tend to destroy, than any ways promote it? How will the Heathen, or the Mahometan, have the least regard for our God, when we ourselves treat him with such open and repeated marks of contempt? Which way shall we make profelytes to our most holy religion, when such an impious practice is not only suffered, but encouraged amongst us? Of what avail is it, that God has strictly commanded a due and awful reverence to be paid to his name,

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when men are hardy enough to blaspheme it in sport and pastime? To what purpose are all those wholesome laws, that have been made to deter men from it, if there prevails such a backwardness to bring offenders to proper punishment? In short, whether the impiety of one set of men, or the remissness or connivance of another, be the most blame-worthy, is not easy to determine.

BUT let these mistaken, these miserable wretches consider, that though 'tis possible, they may escape the punishment due to their demerits from men, yet they cannot fly from the judgment of a justly incensed God. And the commission of this sin, cries so loudly against them, that the glory and honour of God requires satisfaction at their hands. Though immediate judgments, indeed, do not commonly fall down upon these audacious sinners, yet instances may be produced of such as have been actually struck dead, with blasphemy and oaths in their very mouths. And what a dreadful thing must it be, for a man to appear before the awful tribunal of an all-powerful God, and an offended judge, with so dreadful a load of sins upon his head? To think, that the last moment of his life was spent in cursing, that the justice of God over-took him in the actual commission of this dreadful crime, that his last breath was spent in taking the name of his Creator, his God, and his judge, in vain? Hear what the Psalmist says, *He whose delight was in cursing, finds it at last come home to him: He loved not blessing, therefore shall it be far from him. He cloathed himself with cursing, like as with a rayment, and it shall come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones.*

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OUR Blessed Saviour assures us, that for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; what hopes of remittance then can they expect, who have a long reckoning of oaths and blasphemies to settle and adjust? Was the most profligate wretch in life, but sure he should have all the oaths, which he vents so liberally in all companies wherever he comes, most punctually registered; and that he should some time or other pay such a fine as the law directs for each of them, he would doubtless set a watch over the door of his lips; and entertain an awful dread of the sin of swearing; especially, if he were conscious to himself, that whenever the demand should come to be made, and he should be utterly incapable of discharging the fine, he should be condemned to the most painful and ignominious death. And is it not a much more dreadful case to fall into the hands of the living God, who knows, who hears his impious insults, and will at last call him to a dreadful account, and deliver him into outer darkness, to be tormented of Devils?

OTHER sins have either profit or pleasure to commend them; but the prophane swearer cannot pretend there is any temptation for him. The most wicked and abandoned, one might think, would readily forego such a sin as this. The swearer gives away his soul to the Devil; he takes pains to be damned; he kicks, in short, at Heaven, and is fearless of the Almighty. This sin, moreover, is most commonly an indication of an empty and unfurnished mind. Oaths are thrown into discourse to fill up those sentences that would otherwise be most wofully trifling or silly; thus impiety is made a covering for ignorance, and he that has

not a talent to be witty, will shew at least he has a genius to be wicked.

THE swearer, perhaps, imagines, that an oath sounds graceful and bold, and he had rather, 'tis possible, be esteemed daring than wise; but how foolish is it for a man to shew his intrepidity this way! To prophane a Being who is able to strike him dead in an instant! This will prove him horribly rash and adventurous indeed, but not in the least courageous; for true fortitude is shewn in despising dangers for the sake of virtue; in doing such actions as justice warrants, and as wisdom guides. If he swears only to gain the regard and esteem of others as wicked and profligate as himself, or out of fear of being reproached and ill-treated by his impious companions; if this be all his view, then doubtless he shews himself to be an abject, mean-spirited coward indeed, let him affect as much courage as he pleases; there is no such mighty terror in high anger, and this noisy blusterer will often have a shameful occasion to be struck dumb.

As there are no vices, how enormous soever, but some men will find excuses for them; I shall proceed to shew what the swearer generally urges to palliate this abominable sin.

AND first, it is alledged by some, that when they swear, they mean no manner of harm, and that it is rather the result of custom, than any natural disposition to prophaneness.

THE former plea is an aggravation of the guilt, and the latter a most pitiful evasion, an excuse that a man may make for any crime whatsoever; but let him remember, that when sins are once become habitual, they are in the sight of God most abominable, and of the deepest dye.

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SOME indeed are so very cautious, that tho' they take God's name in vain almost every moment, yet they will seem to check themselves, and cry God forgive me for swearing so, or say something to the like effect; and that they imagine to be a sufficient atonement. But yet give me leave to tell you, such a person does not seem sincerely to desire forgiveness; for to ask forgiveness, and to repeat the crime instantaneously, is doubtless an aggravation of the guilt, by adding contempt to the sin. If we will but give ourselves the least time for reflection, this must appear a most miserable way of making an excuse.

SOME plead, that they never swear without some extraordinary provocations. But consider, have not others met with as great, if not greater provocations than you have; and yet they have never indulged their passion, but blessed God, and prayed for their enemies, in the midst of their ill treatment. Immoderate anger is a crime in the sight of God, and oaths and curses surely aggravate the crime. Must God's holy name be blasphemed because you are out of temper? Is this the reverence you pay to an Almighty Being, a bountiful benefactor, a merciful and indulgent Father? *Ingratitude* is of all vices the most *odious*; but to spurn at him, from whom we receive all the blessings we enjoy, is so glaring a crime, that no words can express it in its proper colours.

BESIDES, will your passionate swearing remove, or remedy those evils that disturb you? Because others provoke and offend you, must you vilify the name of your Maker?

AGAIN, it is pretended by some persons, that swearing on some occasions is absolutely necessary, that their servants will not regard their speaking

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mildly to them, and that when their business is in a hurry, it cannot be dispatched without it.

THIS objection, however, is both false and fallacious: some, 'tis true, are so unhappily addicted to this abominable vice, that their servants and dependents expect an oath from them, as much as they do an order. But where they know their master abhors and detests the sin, his word alone is sufficient. They know he has a strict regard for truth, and are sensible, that the punishment due to their neglect is more sure, than if they were threatened by ten thousand oaths to confirm it. Where there is a real power and authority, there swearing becomes perfectly needless, in order to procure regard; and where there is not, the man that practises it, appears noisy indeed, but at the same time makes a most contemptible figure.

As to the man that swears in common conversation, with the view of being more readily believed, he must either be conscious of his own want of merit, or otherwise entertain a very mean and contemptible opinion of those to whom he makes his applications. A man that has a generous way of thinking will imagine, that swearing to the truth of any thing he asserts is altogether needless and impertinent; nay, will look upon it, not only as an *offence to those he speaks to*, but an *high affront to the Almighty*.

SOME have been so wretched as to make this plea for swearing, namely, that it gives a man an air of consequence; and that to be afraid of an oath, when in company with those that are addicted to it, looks unbecoming a boon companion.

THIS plea, indeed, is too weak to be used by any man of sense, were it true; for those persons must be thought strangely void of merit, that
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would court your good opinion of them, by aping of your vices. A generous temper would blush to be thought guilty of so mean an artifice. But give me leave to say, that the whole is absolutely false. Swearing, as I observed before, is every where accounted a breach of good manners; and he that would be esteemed a gentleman, would take it as the most heinous affront to be called a despiser of all decency and order. To suppose, then, that it gives a man an air of consequence is a very idle and absurd notion; for nothing in reality can make him more the object of contempt. I hope, therefore, those who are so unhappy as to set light by the joys of Heaven, or imagine the torments of Hell a mere bugbear; I say, I hope even such, if any such can be, will at last learn decency in their discourse; and tho' they give up all claim to an hereafter, yet they will have some regard for their present character, and avoid the imputation of abandoned wretches, with which all such as are notoriously guilty of this abominable sin are justly branded.

HAVING thus taken notice of most of the pleas that are generally made use of in defence of this sin, I flatter myself, you will very readily allow with me, that the crime is altogether inexcusable. I shall proceed therefore to lay down some few directions for the use of those who have unhappily habituated themselves to this sin, and are desirous to leave it off.

THINK seriously then, in the first place, how deplorable would have been your fate had God taken immediate vengeance on you, and struck you dead in the actual commission of this sin. Think again upon the divine threatnings, and that God will most assuredly punish those, and that

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that severely too, who commit it; for he has declared, in the most solemn manner, *that he will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain.*

You must likewise guard yourself against every sudden and violent gust of passion; you must avoid drinking and gaming, which have a natural tendency to promote the most dangerous quarrels and bitter oaths; you must be very careful what company you keep, and industriously avoid all habitual swearers. How can they, who love and honour the name of God, and of Christ, take delight in such as blaspheme his name, and contemn his laws?—Never indulge yourself in swearing upon low and trivial occasions, tho' you do it with reverence; think seriously of the awfulness of appealing to an All-seeing, and an Almighty God.—You must not dally with this vice, but resolve to break yourself of it at once. Every conviction you sin against is an additional weight to your guilt.

If you would lay some penalty on yourself every time you are guilty of this vice, I am persuaded it would greatly contribute to your cure. The law makes every prophane oath a forfeiture to the poor, and if you, who are addicted to swearing, would but lay such a voluntary fine upon yourself, you would soon feel the good effects of it. But the most effectual remedy is prayer; if you pray seriously, and in a becoming manner, it will fix upon your thoughts such an awful idea of God, that you will not be able to speak lightly, much less prophanely, of him, to whom you have been paying your adoration. Be earnest in your intreaties, that he will give you a heart to turn from the wickedness you have committed, and that by

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his infinite goodness and mercy, you may save your soul alive.

I SHALL beg leave, before I conclude, to offer a few hints to those who are not guilty of this sin themselves, in order to shew them in what manner they should behave towards those that are.

WHENEVER you converse with those who are guilty of this sin, let them perceive, by your disregard of what they say, that you are displeased and grieved for them. If they direct their discourse to you, let them see, that they really lessen themselves in your esteem, by their oaths and imprecations. I will not say, 'tis our duty to reprove every one we hear guilty of this vice; for that, tho' I am sorry to say it, would be a task altogether impossible; besides, to reprove a common swearer in publick, too often makes him worse and more outrageous. And our Saviour has told us, that we are not to cast our pearls before swine. But if any one is very remarkable for this crime, take an opportunity to talk to him in a sober hour, and in private; and if he remains incorrigible, and deaf to all admonition, then his future welfare, as well as the interest of religion, obliges you to inform against him, that he may be punished as the law directs. Would the principal inhabitants of every town but make examples of a few of the most notorious, our streets would not be infested as they are, with this deadly poison. We should not then hear children lisping out curses and oaths, as too commonly we now do. 'Tis really a most dreadful thing, to find our youth, for want of timely instruction and correction, grown old in this vice. The first use of speech that is taught them, by the example of their wicked parents, is

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not only to call down curses upon one another, but to blaspheme their Creator.

THERE are none, I am sensible, but know this assertion to be true; every one hears, every one sees it; our very churches are polluted too often with this abomination. Since then this evil is grown so universal, let us endeavour to put a stop to this contagion. Let us not suffer any who are our dependents, to commit this sin without the severest correction; for we shall save them from much mischief here, and from God's anger hereafter. Keep no servants, employ no persons who are guilty of this vice; relieve not the poor that are thus guilty of dishonouring God; but if their families cry out for your charity, at least with your alms, use menaces, as well as arguments to deter them from it. If every one would, in their respective callings, observe the method prescribed, I am persuaded we should soon see a great and happy reformation.

To conclude, Let every one set a watch before his own mouth, keep the door of his own lips, and take heed that he offend not with his tongue. Let us convince men we are in earnest by our actions, as well as our words. Let the sacred name of God be made use of with the utmost veneration, and have such an awful regard for his Divine Majesty, that we may be found guiltless and unblameable in his sight at the last day.

SUNDAY.



SUNDAY XXV.

God the Poor Man's Friend.

MATTHEW VI. 31, 32.

*Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat?
or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall
we be cloathed? your heavenly Father knoweth
that ye have need of all these things.*



NOTHING less than a power,
who has an absolute command over
all things, who can secure all fu-
ture events, and is perfectly happy
in himself, without any foreign aid
or assistance, can absolutely pro-
cure at all times and seasons an un-
interrupted serenity of mind, and a perfect disre-
gard for all future accidents; for such as are de-
pendent beings, as the whole race of mankind most
indisputably are; such as have no surer succour and
support

support than what results from their own power, which they are conscious to themselves is too weak and precarious to be altogether trusted to and relied upon, must inevitably be uneasy under a lively sense of their own natural weakness and imperfections. All rational creatures, who are daily exposed, as experience frequently evinces, to unforeseen accidents and disappointments, and often plunged into such difficulties as are almost insuperable; if they are not altogether stupid and incurious, through any casual absence of their reason, self-love will naturally rouse them from their lethargy, awaken their solicitude, and create in their minds a thousand gloomy reflections. This, doubtless, must be the case of all the human species, no one excepted, till he has found some shelter and protection which he can wholly rely on. An indigent and defective nature, which if it be ill-conducted, is still more necessitous, is the certain cause of all those anxieties of mind, and careful thoughts which so frequently arise in the human breast. For to what must be ascribed all our ardent desires, and gloomy fears, our tenderest acts of compassion, and those sudden fallies of our warmest resentment? Why, the true reason is this; because our power is so insufficient, that either we cannot accomplish what we aim at, or are under some fearful apprehension of losing that degree of happiness, of which we are actually possessor.

It is, in short, because we cannot alter the situation of things according to our capricious humours, nor keep them steady and fixed in that position we could wish them. And notwithstanding the affections of our minds were duly disposed, yet the notion that our necessities were not fully supplied, or sufficiently secured, would unavoidably create
in

in our minds some gloomy thoughts, which we could never dispel, without flying for succour and relief to that Almighty Power, who is not only able, but willing to assist us. It is he alone can redress our grievances, and dispel all the dark clouds that overwhelm us, who can gratify all our most ardent desires, and perfectly secure us from all those evils which surround us; and of which we conceive such frightful apprehensions. - For which reason, the Apostle St. Paul, in his exhortations to the *Philippians*, amongst other precepts there laid down, advises them to *be careful for nothing*; but then it is with some restriction; as if he had said, it is a duty incumbent on you not to be over-solicitous about the transitory enjoyments of this life; yet by prayer and supplication you must let your requests be known to God, who alone is able to answer them, and will likewise answer them to your *utmost satisfaction*, if it will prove for your real benefit and advantage.

Had not this great Apostle recommended them to this infallible remedy, he would have found, in all probability, that but few of them would have hearkened to his wholesome admonitions. For notwithstanding the deepest solicitude and anxiety of mind that can be conceived will not contribute in the least towards the actual amendment of our circumstances, whatever unhappy situation they may possibly be in; yet such as are without God in the world, and put their whole trust and confidence in an arm of *flesh*, can never be capable of commanding their passion to such a degree, as never to be ruffled and discomposed, either through the actual sense, or timorous apprehension of some future misfortune.

However,

However, notwithstanding we are to put our trust and confidence in God only, who is able, not only to preserve us from all dangers, when we ourselves can discern no visible way for our escape, and can provide for us, when we are destitute of all human succour and support; notwithstanding we ought to throw all our care and concern upon him, not only for our future happiness and welfare in this world, but our eternal felicity in the next; yet we are not to suppose, that the Almighty will provide for us in a miraculous way, or that the sense of our Blessed Saviour's words in the text will admit of such a construction. If we expect to meet with success in our temporal concerns, we must not indulge ourselves in indolence and ease; for that would be tempting only, and not relying on the Divine Providence, but we must make use of those means to which the wisdom of God has directed us for the attainment of our desires; we must use our utmost endeavours for success, and pursue our business and employments with all due diligence and application: For indolence is the inlet to all misfortunes. *Idleness*, we are expressly told by *Solomon*, *will cloath a man with rags*. And the same doctrine holds as good under the Gospel-dispensation, as it did before the promulgation of it. For *St. Paul* peremptorily declares, that he that does not by a regular and industrious course of life take care to provide for his family, *has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*; and in another place, in order to discourage us from spending our time in a slothful and unprofitable manner, he directly affirms, that all such *as will not work*, that is, will not exert themselves in that station of life to which Providence has allotted them, to their utmost abilities, *neither shall they eat*, i. e. neither

neither be furnished even with the necessaries, and much less with the conveniencies of life. The design therefore of our Blessed Saviour, in the words of our text, could be no more, than to dissuade us from being over-sollicitous about future events, from perplexing our minds because our affairs do not prove altogether so successful as we could wish them, and because our share of the good things of this life fall short of what others possess, who are seemingly less active and industrious than ourselves. The lesson of instruction, in short, which is here read to us, is this; "that we should use our utmost endeavours to make our circumstances in this life as easy and comfortable as possibly we can; to leave the event of them to Providence, and in whatsoever station of life we are planted, be it what it will, not to murmur or repine, but to sit down contented with that share or proportion, be it more or less, which Providence has thought fit to bestow upon us, as being fully convinced, that the Almighty has a tender regard for all his creatures, and knows what is for their good much better than they themselves."

We frequently find, indeed, in the course of our temporal affairs, that we are involved in so many troubles and difficulties, that we know not what measures to pursue, or which way to turn, in order to save ourselves from impending ruin; we can neither determine what is most proper, or most prudential to be done for our ease and safety; neither can we find out a sincere friend, who is either able, or willing to assist us when our circumstances are so visibly in an unhappy posture. Now, in such perplexities, to whom can we fly for succour and relief, with such assurance of success, as the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength?

And we have all the encouragement imaginable to make our humble and earnest applications to him in such a time of need, if we will but reflect either on the wisdom and goodness of God, or on his promises, and our own experience of the many undeserved favours which we have from time to time received at his hands.

The wisdom of the Almighty is such, that there is no circumstance in life so intricate and perplexed, so difficult or involved, that he cannot give us proper counsel or advice, that he cannot infallibly direct and guide us in the way to extricate ourselves out of all our distresses, if he sees convenient; and so great is his goodness and condescension, that he will never deny us his aid and assistance, when we have recourse to him for counsel under a due sense of our own weakness and inability, and put our whole trust and confidence in his unerring guidance and direction. If we will but cast our care upon God, he will always have compassion on our weak and helpless condition, and point out to us an infallible way to extricate ourselves out of those distresses with which we are surrounded.

And as his wisdom and goodness is infinite, as he is always able to help us; so he has been graciously pleased, in numberless places of the sacred Scriptures, to promise his divine assistance to all those who look up to him for succour, who wholly confide in, and rely upon his infinite mercies, and who commit both themselves and their concerns without the least diffidence or distrust to his care and conduct. *Commit thy way unto the Lord,* says the royal Psalmist, *trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.* *Commit thy works unto the Lord,* says Solomon, *and the thoughts of thy heart shall be established:* and again, in another place, he says;

Trust

Trust in the Lord with all thy heart ; lean not to thy own understanding ; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. The Lord, says the Prophet Isaiah, shall guide thee continually, shall teach thee to profit, and lead thee by the way that thou shouldst go, and Saint James exhorts all such as lack wisdom "to ask it of God who giveth liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." From all which places of Holy Writ, we have all the comfortable assurances which we can possibly desire, that God is not only perfectly able, but willing to be indulgent to us, to advise, direct and guide all such as with an humble confidence apply to him for aid in their distress.

Such a confidence and trust in God as this, will doubtless seem highly requisite, and very easy to those who abound in temporal blessings, whose cup, as it were, runs over, and who never had any idea of the anxieties and cares that naturally attend an indigent condition. Such, however, as are reduced to the lowest ebb of fortune, I doubt, find it no such easy matter to submit with cheerfulness to the seemingly severe dispensations of Providence, or to rely and confide sincerely and without hesitation on the Lord for succour and support in the days of their distress. Such is the depravity of the human nature, that, under uneasy circumstances, the best of men are apt to call in question God's care and concern for them, to distrust his Providence, and to disturb and distract their minds with ten thousand anxious reflections, frequently murmuring and repining at their fate ; saying, "What shall we eat ? And what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be cloathed ?" However, notwithstanding all such murmurings and complaints, which will sometimes force their way, and escape from us, thro' the frailties of nature ; yet we should never give way to despon-

dency, but fortify our minds with recollecting the encouragement that we have to put our trust and confidence in God in our greatest exigencies; when the sense of our misfortunes strike the strongest on our imaginations, when we are under the severe temptation of censuring the justice and goodness of Providence, and almost drove to the brink of horror and despair, then let us endeavour to hush the tempest that thus ruffles our thoughts, by a sedate and mature reflection, that there are many gracious and indulgent promises in the sacred Scriptures whereby God has engaged to provide for us. "They that seek the Lord, says the holy Psalmist, who had many conflicts of this nature on account of his almost insupportable afflictions shall want no good thing. No good thing will he with-hold from them that walk uprightly:" and the Prophet *Isaiab*, speaking of the righteous, and such as put their trust in the Lord their God assures them, "that bread shall be given them and that their waters shall be sure." The Evangelist St. *Matthew* assures us, "that to such as in the first place seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all other things shall be added." And the Apostle St. *Paul*, in his epistle to the *Hebrews*, assures them, that "God will never leave nor forsake them that are his." And in another place, he says, "that godliness hath the promises of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Again, when we are cast down, and our souls are disquieted within us, we should hush, and appease our unjust complaints by the consideration, that God is liberal and indulgent even to his enemies. "They have, says holy *David*, more than their hearts can wish. He gives them their portion in this life, and fills their bellies with his hidden

hidden treasure. God maketh his Sun to rise upon the evil as well as upon the good, and sendeth rain alike upon the just and the unjust." The worst and most profligate wretches are often successful, and are plentifully supplied with the good things of this life: "their houses are safe from fear; neither is the rod of God upon them; they spend their days in wealth, but in a moment go down to the grave." If now God is so kind and indulgent to those who are altogether undeserving of his favours, will he not hearken to the supplications of his own children, when they apply to him for a bare maintenance and support?

ONCE more, when you are over-whelmed with troubles, when you find any distrusts arise within you, do but seriously consider, that God's goodness is so extensive, that he even provides for the irrational part of his creation. "The eyes of all, says the Psalmist, wait upon him; he giveth them their meat in due season: he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." Our blessed Saviour himself, in order to prevent us from entertaining any distrustful thoughts of God's Providence, has recourse to the very same argument. "Behold the fowls of the air, says he, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather in barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them."

ONCE more let me beg of you to consult both your own experience, and that of all such as are God's true and faithful servants. Tho' 'tis possible you may frequently have been in great sorrow and trouble; yet can you with justice say, that God ever absolutely forsook those that sought him? Did he not, one way or other, find ways

and means for your succour and support? "I have been young, says the Psalmist, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread." Is it any ways reasonable, therefore, that we should distrust God's Providence, who never as yet, failed any of those who have put their trust in him? Why should we not conclude, that he who hath hitherto provided for us, will still send us in such suitable supplies as he, in his unerring wisdom and infinite goodness, sees most convenient for us?

To conclude, whenever any jealous thoughts arise in our hearts; whenever we are tempted to entertain any diffidence or distrust of the divine Providence, let us consider, that God hath expressly forbidden us to indulge all such anxiety of mind, all such care and sollicitude in regard to the conveniencies of this transitory life; and that to relieve us under such gloomy reflections he hath taken all the care upon himself." Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." And the Apostle Saint *Paul* exhorts the *Philippians*, "to be careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make their Request known unto God."

THAT we may be duly sensible of, and thankful for the abundant care and providence of our heavenly Father, God, of his infinite mercy grant through the merits of his Son, our blessed Lord and Saviour, to whom with the Holy Ghost be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, and power, both now and for evermore.

Amen.

SUN.



SUNDAY XXVI.

The Certainty of a Day of Judgment.

ACTS XVII, 31.

He hath appointed a Day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness.



THE words we have now read to you are part of an address made by the Apostle St. Paul to the *Athenians*, wherein he reproves them for being over-superstitious, and for paying the tribute of divine Adoration to that God, of whom, by the very inscription on their altar, it was plain, they had but little, if any knowledge, or conception. Whereupon, he endeavours to enlighten their understandings, and give them an awful idea of the only living and true God, the great Author of nature. He tells them, that God "who made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of Heaven, and Earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped

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with mens hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." And in order to confirm them in this just and exalted idea of his creating-power, he produces a quotation from one of their own poets, who tells them, that *in him*, that is, in the Supreme Being, the first principle of all things, and the great architect of the universe, *we live, move, and have our Being*; and immediately after, not only assigns a sufficient reason for that assertion, but draws an undeniable conclusion against superstition and idolatry from it; for, says he, we are all his offspring; and forasmuch as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think, that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art, and man's device." However, he acknowledges, as a sort of an alleviation of the guilt of idol-worship in former ages, that God connived at the ignorance of those times, but then, he immediately subjoins, that now, that is, in the enlightened age in which they lived, he commandeth all men every where to repent. And thereupon, in the words of our text, assigns an incontestible reason for their compliance with that injunction; *because*, says he, *God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness.*

HOWEVER, as the general day of judgment is an invisible state at present, and as wicked men, would vainly flatter themselves, it never will come at all, since things seem at present as they were at the creation; it is highly requisite, that we should endeavour to convince them of a truth, which is a concern of the last and highest importance to the whole race of mankind, as it will irreversibly

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bly determine their final state of happiness, or misery, to eternal ages.

THESE considerations, therefore, have induced me to offer you some arguments, both from reason and revelation, to prove, that however distant the day of judgment may seem to be, yet that it will inevitably come.

THE heathens themselves, from the dim light of nature, and the dint of reason only, could discover, beyond all contradiction, that there was one all-wise Creator of the universe, and every thing therein contained; that every species of Beings, of what nature or kind soever, was subject to his Divine Will, and governed, and directed by his over-ruling Providence; that man was composed of body and soul; and that though the former was a mass of clay, and subject to corruption, yet the latter was both immaterial and immortal; that there were judges appointed, in the infernal regions, to examine into the actions of such as were deceased, in order to reward those who had spent their lives in a regular course of virtue, and to punish those who had indulged their sensual appetites, and had shewed no marks of veneration for the Gods; and this was a subject very frequently discoursed on amongst them, and in that sense, they universally acknowledged a future judgment: but the Will of God, which is revealed to us in the sacred Scriptures, has given us a much plainer assurance of this general day of retribution, and has enabled us to make much greater discoveries thereof, than we possibly could by the dim light of nature. Tho' reason alone, without Divine Revelation, may convince us, as it did the heathen world, that the virtuous shall meet with some suitable recompence or reward,
and

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and the wicked some punishment, proportioned to their demerits in the world to come; yet it could never inform us, that there would be a general day of judgment, in which all those that were dead should rise again from their graves, that their scattered particles of dust should be reunited, and that their souls should resume their former station; it could never point out to us the particular person that should summon us to appear before him on that great and awful day, nor give us any adequate idea of the pomp and solemnity of it. This the world was wholly unacquainted with, before the promulgation of the Gospel; since all these circumstances absolutely depend upon the free will and pleasure of that God who made the world, and consequently, can be discovered no other way, than by his own Revelation. However, as reason alone gives us a moral evidence and assurance that there will be a future judgment, and the sacred Scriptures confirm the important truth, I am persuaded, that the arguments which may be drawn from both, if duly attended to, may be sufficient to convince the most obstinate unbelievers.

FIRST then, as we are conscious to ourselves, that the brutal part of the creation, which are governed by instinct only, can never be called to an account for their actions, because they have no knowledge of what they do; so, on the other hand, as man is endowed with rational faculties, is capable of distinguishing between good and evil, and knows perfectly well whatever he does; so 'tis a very strong presumption, that he may be judged, or summoned to give an account for them.

WHERE there is no rule for our conduct, there is no place for judgment. Where nothing is enjoined,
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there nothing is prohibited or forbid. Were there no rule of good and evil, there could be no room for either rewards or punishments, and by consequence none for judgment. But as all mankind have either the light of nature to guide and direct them, or the still clearer light of revelation, and may therefore so act as to deserve either to be rewarded or punished in a future state, it naturally follows, that they may likewise, and undeniably will be summoned to appear at God's awful tribunal, to give an account for them.

IF, however, it be highly requisite, that man, who is a rational creature, should be accountable for his actions, why should we in the least doubt, whether the all-wise Author of nature should call him to an account, and require a reason of him?

DID he act by necessity or fate, and not by choice, he would be no more capable of being judged than the brutal part of the creation, or any inanimate Being whatsoever; but as he is a free agent, and not only knows how to distinguish between good and evil, but can make choice of the one, and avoid the other, he is consequently capable of commendation or reproof, of rewards or punishments, according to his works.

IF the Almighty has prescribed laws for the regulation of a man's conduct, can it reasonably be supposed, that the violation, or observance of them, can be a matter of indifference to him? Were they so, to what purpose were they given? No human government was ever so remiss, so regardless of their laws, as not to commend those who complied with them, or at least, to punish those who acted in open defiance and contempt of them; and shall we charge the Almighty with such

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such absurdities in the government of the world, as the weakest of the human species would blush to be guilty of? Would we allow God, in short, to be but as wise and discreet as one of our princes here on earth, we might conclude, with all the assurance imaginable, that as he has prescribed laws for the regulation and government of mankind; so he will judge them by those laws.

AND as man is a free agent, there is no other way can possibly be thought of to work upon him, than by the certain hopes of some future reward, or the awful apprehension of some future punishment. For, as a free agent, he cannot be governed by force, or arbitrary power; since that would, to all intents and purposes, destroy his liberty: From whence it undeniably follows, that if the Almighty has any sway or dominion over mankind at all, he must call them to an account, and must reward or punish them according to their works. And though this does not in direct terms, fully, and beyond all contradiction, demonstrate a future judgment; yet it is a strong presumption at least, that there will be a general day appointed for that purpose. All that I propose to infer from what has been hitherto said, is this, that in case the Almighty governs mankind as rational Beings, he must call them to an account, or bring them to judgment.

BUT further, to demonstrate the certainty of a future judgment, let us have recourse to the sacred Scriptures. He that made the world, can best acquaint us with the manner in which it will be disposed of: As his decrees are backed by Omnipotence, what he directs and appoints must inevitably come to pass. Now, we find this important truth confirmed by the express declara-

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declarations of our blessed Saviour himself, as well as by his holy Apostles.

T H E hour is coming, saith Christ, in which all that are in their graves shall bear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. St. Paul tells us, in the epistle to the Corinthians, *That we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.* St. John, in his Revelations, entertained so strong and lively idea of this great and awful appearance, that he describes it with almost as much exactness and punctuality, as if the ceremony of it had been long since past, and he had been actually an eye-witness of the solemn and pompous manner, in which it was performed. *I saw, says he, a great white throne, and him that sat on it; from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away, and there was no place found for them; and I saw the dead, small and great stand before God; and the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books; and the sea gave up her dead, and death and hell delivered up their dead, which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works.* There are various places in the sacred Scriptures, which might be enumerated for the confirmation of this awful and mysterious truth; I shall at present, however, have recourse but to one more, and that is, the remarkable argument which St. Paul makes use of in our text, to induce the *Athenians* to repent before it was too late, of all their sins in general, but of that to which they were more peculiarly habituated, namely, of the grossest superstition, and a strong propensity

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propensity to the worship of strange Gods, and the erecting of altars in honour to mere stocks and stones, the workmanship of mens hands, who were as senseless idolaters as themselves.

“Forasmuch, says he, as we are all the offspring of God, we ought not to think, that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device:—And the times of this ignorance, God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

SINCE therefore, it is highly just and reasonable to suppose, that the Almighty will judge the whole race of mankind at one solemn and grand Assize, that grand and solemn sessions must most assuredly be reserved to the day, wherein the whole frame of nature shall be dissolved. At the end of the world, the Angels shall separate the wheat from the tares, which grew in the same field; between the good and the bad fish, which were caught in the same net: In the Gospel, according to *St. Matthew*, we find the day of judgment, called the evening of the world, when the Lord shall come to reckon with his servants, and to reward those who have laboured in his vineyard, and likewise to punish all such as have concealed those talents with which they were entrusted. And *St. Peter*, in his second Epistle, to the strangers who were scattered throughout *Pontus*, and *Galatia*, and divers other remote parts of the earth, gives them all the assurance imaginable, not only that the Saviour of mankind would

would most certainly come to judgment against those scorers who at that time disputed against it ; saying, where is the promise of his coming, since all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation ? But further warns them, for the long patience of God, to hasten their repentance ; and more especially, not to defer it one moment longer ; *because the day of the Lord, says he, will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.* Having given them this assurance of the certainty of the thing, and informed them, that it would come to pass ; the practical use which he there makes of it is this, in the words immediately following, “ seeing then, says he, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness ? ”

AND moreover, it seems very reasonable, that the day of judgment, and the dissolution of the whole frame of nature should come together ; for as the earth was principally created for the convenience and delight of man, whom the Almighty constituted Lord of the universe ; so 'tis highly reasonable to suppose, that it should be reduced to ashes at the time when all its inhabitants should be summoned out of it to make their general appearance at Christ's awful tribunal. When man, for whose use and delight, as I before observed, this world was principally created, shall dwell no longer on it, but all the righteous shall be made partakers of the heavenly kingdom, and all the wicked shall be consigned to the regions of darkness, this world will have lasted then as long as
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the Almighty proposed it should ; and must for that reason, be new-moulded, or cast into a new frame, though not absolutely destroyed. For so the sacred Scriptures represent it ; that as the whole creation was by *Adam's* fall, made liable to corruption ; so, when he and his posterity should be redeemed from it, the world should be so too. It should be purged by fire, and another which should be incorruptible should spring out of its ashes. For the earnest expectation of the creature, says *St. Paul* to the *Romans*, *waiteth for the manifestation of the Sons of God.* And thus *St. Peter* assures us, likewise, *that at the last judgment this world shall be destroyed with fire, nevertheless, we,* says he, *according to his promise, look for a new heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* And thus *St. John*, at the close of his *Apocalypse*, immediately after his description of the last day, gives us a particular account of this new heaven, and new earth. *And I saw, a new heaven, and a new earth : for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea ; and I John, saw the holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, the tabernacle of God is with men, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death ; neither sorrow nor crying ; neither shall there be any more pain ; for the former things are passed away.* Though it must be acknowledged, that these truths are too dark and intricate, too abstruse and mysterious for our perfect comprehension at present ; yet it gives us a satisfactory account, why the last judgment shall not be till the evening

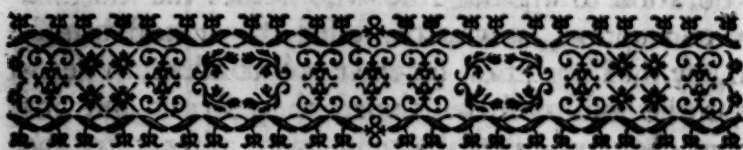
evening of the world ; because, the frame of this old world must be dissolved, before the new heaven and the new earth before-mentioned can be made. The final sentence of condemnation of the wicked must be therefore past, as soon as this old world shall be reduced to ashes ; and the recompence and rewards of the righteous, shall then be consummated at the creation of the new world, be the nature of it what it will, where they shall dwell forever in the immediate presence of God, and partake of those rivers of pleasure, which flow at his right hand for evermore.

THAT we may so demean ourselves in this world, as to meet our Saviour and Judge, with joy and transport, when time shall be no more ; God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits and meditation of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with the Holy Ghost be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, and power, both now and forever. *Amen.*



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SUNDAY

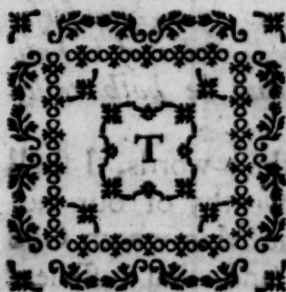


SUNDAY XXVII.

Jesus Christ, the Man appointed to
judge the World.

ACTS XVII, 31.

*He hath appointed a Day, in the which he will
judge the world in righteousness, by that Man
whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given
assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised
him from the dead.*



THESE words are part of a
very warm and earnest expo-
stulation of the Apostle St.
Paul with the Athenians, who
were then assembled together
in a great multitude on Mars's
Hill, out of curiosity, to lis-
ten to his new doctrine: and
therein this undaunted Champion, and advocate of
the Christian Cause, very severely checks them for
their being too fond of all superstitious rites and
ceremo-

ceremonies, and for paying their tribute of Divine Adoration to a Being, of whom they had no idea or conception, as was confessed, or at least implied, by the inscription on their public altar. Whereupon he endeavours to open their eyes, and inform their judgments better, with respect to the only living and true God.—He acknowledged, indeed, by way of alleviation of the guilt of idol-worship in former ages, that the Supreme Being connived, as it were, at the darkness and ignorance of those times; but that, since he had sent his only begotten, his dearly-beloved Son into the world, to reveal his Divine Will, and by his death and passion, to save the worst of sinners, who would believe in him, and sincerely repent of their past ill conduct, such idolatrous practices were not only blame-worthy, but altogether inexcusable: and as the strongest motive that he could think of to induce them to enter upon, and set in earnest about, such an immediate reformation, he assigns so cogent a reason for the necessity of it, as was then invincible, and I hope will still be thought no less obligatory on us, than on the Pagan world.—*God, says he, commandeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a Day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

IN the further illustration of these words, I shall dwell on two points as highly worthy of our notice, namely, the character of the Man whom God hath ordained to be our judge, and what sufficient reasons we have to be well assured that he, and no other shall be so.

AND first, as to the Man whom the Almighty has made choice of, and appointed for the execution of that important office. He is no less a person than his own dearly beloved Son, the Man *Christ Jesus*: and that divine Man, or second person in the Sacred Trinity, has assured us himself, as well as his Holy Apostles, that his Father will not judge the world immediately by himself, but resign it absolutely to the conduct and unerring judgment of his Son. *The Father*, saith St. *John* the Evangelist, *judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son*. Again, *the Son of Man*, saith St. *Matthew*, *shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then shall he reward every man according to his works*. And St. *Peter*, in discoursing with *Cornelius*, about our Blessed Lord and Saviour, assures him, that all the Apostles in general were commanded by him to preach unto the people, and to testify, *that it is he which was ordained by God to be the judge both of the quick and the dead*.

HOWEVER, as it would be needless to enumerate all the texts of Scripture that might be produced for the confirmation of this point; and since the case is too plain and obvious to need any farther proof, I shall proceed to enquire into the reason, why *Christ Jesus*, who, tho' a God incarnate, is equal with his Father, should, for the generality, be represented as a *Man*, or the *Son of a Man*, whenever he is introduced as the sole person appointed to be the judge of the whole earth: he is *that Man whom God hath ordained, and the Son of Man*. And moreover, we find, in the Gospel according to St. *John*, that the Blessed Jesus assures us, *that God, for this reason, hath given him*

authority

authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.

Now the principal reason why our Blessed Lord is thus spoken of as a *Man*, and the *Son of Man*, when he shall come and act in the capacity of judge of the whole world, I conceive to be this, because he will at that time appear visibly, and as much in the form of a man, as he did when he was incarnate, and resided here upon earth; tho' he will, doubtless, make his appearance in a much more solemn and pompous manner, and more like the Son of the Great God, the Lord both of heaven and earth. Give me leave to lay before you the beautiful description, which the Prophet *Daniel* has given us of his glorious appearance upon that awful day. *I saw, says he, in the night visions, and behold one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the antient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed: It is the Son of Man, on whom this glory, and this kingdom is conferred, and it is he who is to act, or officiate as the Son of Man.*

THERE are some, indeed, imagine, that the Blessed *Jesus* styles himself, so frequently as he does, the *Son of Man*, in regard to his state of humiliation, and the mean figure which he made whilst here upon earth; but it is evident, beyond all contradiction, that their notion is false and groundless; for those particular terms, the *Son of Man*, have no reference throughout the whole sacred Scriptures to such a mean and narrow circumstance

of life, as distinguishes one part of the human species from another; but it either denotes nothing more than a man, or has some relation to the common infirmities of the human nature, and when this phrase is applied in the *Old Testament* to any particular persons, it is never made use of as a characteristick, or mark of an inferior person, but of some powerful prince, or Holy Prophet. Thus a *Voice* said to *Ezekiel*, *Son of Man stand upon thy feet*; so likewise the Angel *Gabriel* to the Prophet *Daniel*, understand *O Son of Man!* And our Blessed Lord himself intimates to us, by his title, or denomination of the *Son of Man*, that he is that favourite of the Almighty, that great and awful person before-mentioned in the *Visions* of the Prophet *Daniel*; the *sole Man*, in short, *that is ordained to be judge of the whole race of mankind*.

HAVING thus shewn you, that our Blessed Lord and Saviour *Jesus Christ* is the *only Man* thus ordained, or pitched upon, *to judge both the quick and the dead*, I shall proceed to assign some reasons, to prove, how fit it is, that he, who died for the salvation of sinners, should be the person appointed to summon them before his awful Tribunal, and bring them to judgment.

AND one very substantial reason, why the Saviour of the world should be the judge of it, is this, because the power and authority of judging is essential to the notion and authority of a Saviour.

Now to be the *Saviour of Mankind*, is to deliver them from their sins, and that is the true import of that emphatical name *Jesus*; and to deliver them from their sins, is to absolve them from the punishment due to them; and that is, to free them from the wrath and displeasure of an offend-
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ed Deity, from the curse of the law, from death and hell, to raise them from the dead, and to confer upon them an immortal, and never-fading crown of glory. Now there are various acts which must concur, in order to render their salvation perfect and complete, and judgment is the last. And he only can be a complete Saviour who has full power to condemn, to acquit, and to reward.

As God is a pure Being, and can never be reconciled to sinful man, till he is made pure, it is highly requisite, that he, who is his Saviour should change his nature, and make him holy as God is holy: for *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*. Again, he must be a great Prophet, and a powerful Preacher, in order *to turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God*. And as God is just and righteous, and has declared, that he who is guilty of sin shall die; it is therefore requisite, that the Saviour of sinners should make an attonement for their sins, should deliver them from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for them, and intercede with God on their behalf. A sinner, however, is not saved, till he is finally absolved; and judgment compleats his salvation. *Christ*, therefore, could not have been the Saviour of mankind, if he had not been their judge. For which reason, after he had died for them, and thereby made an expiation for their sins, he tells his Disciples, *All power is given unto me both in heaven and in earth*: and this power is the reward of his obedience, and the sufferings he underwent for our sakes. Therefore *God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue*

tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. His power as a Saviour, is ascribed to his intercession for us, wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. And as our reconciliation to God is imputed to Christ's death, so is our salvation ascribed unto his life: for if, says St. Paul, *when we were enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son; much more being reconciled, we should be saved by his life;* that is, freed from the indignation of the Almighty, by the power of a living Saviour. Upon the same account, *Christ is said to be delivered for our offences, and to be raised again for our justification,* that is, finally to absolve us, and pardon all our sins at the day of judgment.

BUT there is another very substantial reason why our Saviour should be our judge, and that is, because this gives a sanction to all the methods of salvation. This will give a great weight and authority to all his laws and counsels, to consider, that he who assumed the human nature, on purpose to declare the Will of God to us, shall come again to judge us by that Gospel which he preached. There would be no reason why the Saviour of the world should have preached at all, or have given any laws to mankind, if he intended to have no regard to them, when he shall come to judge the world, but if the judge of the whole earth become a Preacher, it is a duty highly incumbent on us to hearken to his instruction; for whether we will be obedient to his laws or not, we must indisputably be judged by them.

THIS likewise will give a prodigious credit to all his promises and threatenings. Has *Christ* promised to absolve and pardon all such as truly re-
pent

repent them of their sins? Has he promised to bestow upon us an immortal crown of glory, and a kingdom that shall have no end? Then we may safely rely upon his word, since he, who has promised, is able to perform. He has power and authority to pardon all our sins, to raise our dead bodies out of their graves, to make them incorruptible and glorious; and to introduce us into the presence of the Almighty, at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore. And since he, who took upon him the human nature, in order to die for us, and reconcile us to God, has power to do it; since he, who has promised us this great Salvation, has the disposal of all things in his own hands; is not this a sufficient motive to us, *to be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord?*

AND have not all obstinate and perverse sinners equal reason to expect, that *Christ* will execute that vengeance upon them which he has threatened; that he will consign them to the regions of darkness, where there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth to eternal ages; since he is the judge of the world, has all power given him in order to do it, and we have all the reason in the world to believe that he will do it; since he is a God, in a word, that cannot lie, and has made a solemn declaration, that he will punish all hardened and impenitent sinners according to their demerits?

A THIRD substantial reason why the *Man Christ Jesus*, who is the Saviour of the world, should be the judge of it is this, that this important office, thus conferred upon him, is a suitable reward for his infinite condescension, in assuming the human nature,

nature, and becoming an expiatory sacrifice for a sinful world. *Great is the mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh.* 'Twas with no other view, but to save us from death, and the eternal punishment justly due to our demerits, that he came down into the world, and dwelt among us. *Tho' he was in the form of God, says St. Paul, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God; yet he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.* Tho' our Blessed Saviour condescended, in this miraculous manner, to conceal his Divinity under so mean a form; tho' he submitted to lead such an obscure life, to be treated with all the marks of ignominy and contempt; and, at last, to die upon a Cross between two malefactors; and endure all this for the paternal love which he bore to mankind; yet it was highly requisite, that there should be a time, when this Sun of righteousness should be no longer eclipsed, and that he should at last break forth with a double lustre. The world cannot but be conscious of the greatness and excellency of the person who thus condescended to visit them, to be despised and rejected by them, and to be *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs*; but for that very reason, *Christ* is now exalted to the right hand of his Father, as a fitting recompence for his humiliation, and taking upon him the infirmities of human nature, and shines in his true glory; but then that pomp and splendor, in which he appears at present, is conspicuous only to the Blessed Inhabitants of the heavenly mansions. Those who treated him with all the marks of contempt and derision, who were the implacable enemies of him and his Disciples,

ciples, and who, in short, were actually concerned in the crucifixion of the one, and the persecution of the others, after his decease; those, in a word, who long since have treated him with almost equal contempt, and have openly violated his most holy laws, and contemned his worship, have no sense or idea at present of the majesty and glory of the incarnate God; but when he comes to judge both the quick and the dead, at the last day, then his eternal majesty and divine power will be displayed in its full lustre; then all shall see it with wonder and amazement. Now the firm persuasion, *that Christ is the Man, ordained by God to judge the world at the last day*, puts an end to the scandal and reproach of the Cross; tho' a few wretches may laugh at a crucified God, and his intercession for us; yet I am fully persuaded, that we are not among the number of those, that will be ashamed to own the Blessed *Jesus*, or to pay the tribute of adoration to him, who suffered under *Pontius Pilate*, was crucified, dead and buried, for this reason, among many others, because God hath raised him from the dead, and hath made him both Lord and Christ.

A FOURTH reason why the *Man Christ Jesus* should be ordained to judge both the quick and the dead, is this, namely, that it gives a great advantage to the future judgment. For the very appearance of the *Son of Man* for that purpose, will convince all mankind of the justice and equity of the last judgment.

If we ourselves might have been indulged in the free choice of the person to be appointed for the judge of the whole earth, could we have desired any thing more, than that the person so chosen

chosen should in all respects be a just and good man? It is an awful and tremendous thing to be judged by God himself; for who is so pure, who is so presumptuous as to approach his awful Tribunal? *He chargeth his angels with folly, and the Heavens are not clean in his sight.* We have some grounds, however, to expect a more favourable judgment from a Man, who has shewn a peculiar regard to the human nature, who is conscious of all its infirmities, and the numerous temptations to which it is exposed.

ADD to all this, we have not only a Man, but an incarnate God, a God personally united to our nature, to be the judge both of the quick and the dead. And since God has taken upon him the form of a Man, and is ordained to be our judge, if either the one or the other is able to help us, we are absolutely safe; no one has any just reason to entertain a formidable idea of so indulgent a judge, who has not been such an obstinate and perverse sinner, as that the mercies of a God, or the compassions of a Man cannot possibly reach him. And he who will never repent, but will die in his sins, must perish everlastingly, and the most compassionate man that can be supposed, must vindicate the justice of God in his final condemnation.

AGAIN, can we reasonably desire a more just and favourable judge than the very Man who died on purpose to save us? It was a mystery of Godliness, a transcendent condescension, and mark of divine love in *Christ*, to assume the human nature, to take upon him the form of a servant, to bear the infirmities of flesh and blood, and at last to die for our sakes; and since this is our happy case, can we reasonably imagine, that he will be an austere judge; that he will condemn any sinners, but
such

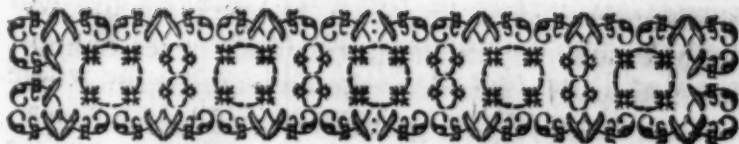
such as are incorrigible, and render themselves altogether undeserving of his infinite goodness and mercy?

THO' it be thus happy for all truly penitent sinners, that the *Man Christ Jesus* is to be their judge, and I hope, that all here present will endeavour, by their sincere contrition for their present miscarriages, and by an immediate reformation, to be entitled to his favour and indulgence; yet lest there should be any among us insensible of the danger of delaying their repentance to an advanced age, or till the time of their languishing on a sick bed; give me leave to close this discourse with representing to you, in a few words, how shocking and tremendous a thing it must certainly be, to hear *the Man Christ Jesus*, who came into the world to save all mankind, pronounce his final sentence of condemnation upon those miserable wretches who presumed to defy his threatenings, and to die in their sins. How tumultuous must the thoughts of such sinners be at that awful day! How must they then stand aghast, and self-convicted! What agonies of guilt and despair must they then labour under! For could they with any glimpse of reason excuse themselves, or the most compassionate fellow-creatures could justly make the least plea for them, their judge likewise would shew his bowels of pity and compassion for them. How shall they be able to bear the thoughts, that the day of grace was lost by their own folly and presumption! The very idea of it must amaze and confound them. How deep must the reflection of their being damned by their Saviour sink into their souls! Will not such a person be apt to break out into exclamations of this nature?—"Had I not been wanting to myself, I had been entitled to the mercy of my
Judge

Judge and Saviour! Was he, who has now consigned me to the mansion of eternal darkness, nailed fast upon a Cross to save me from eternal damnation? Did he lay down his precious life to purchase for me an immortal, and never fading crown of glory; and does he now consign me to that place of torment, against his own inclination? And is the terrible sentence pronounced against me the sole result of my own demerits? Wretch that I am!"—What agonies, what horror, what confusion and despair must accompany such reflections as these, are too strong to be well conceived, and altogether impossible to be expressed by the most comprehensive words.

God, therefore, of his infinite mercy grant, thro' the intercession of his dearly-beloved Son, who is our Saviour, and is ordained to be our Judge, that none of us may feel those bitter pangs; but on the other hand, may hear, with ineffable joy at the last day, his comfortable invitation of the Righteous, and I hope of all here present amongst that happy number, namely, *Come ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Amen.*

SUNDAY



SUNDAY XXVIII.

A Description of the Day of
Judgment.

MATTHEW XXV. 31.

*When the Son of Man shall come in his glory,
and all the holy angels with him, then shall
he sit upon the throne of his glory.*



Y present business will be to describe the pomp and grandeur of that *general day* of *retribution*, when the *Son of Man* shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, and to shew you, that a definitive sentence will then be past, without the least partiality or respect of persons.

One great circumstance of the terror with which the wicked will be struck upon that *great day* is
this

this, that it will come upon them unawares; at a time when they little expect it: *The day of the Lord will come* (as we are told in the sacred Scriptures) *like a thief in the night*; the last age shall stand as much astonished at the conflagration of the world, as *that* of *Noah* did, when the whole face of the earth was covered with the waters. They will then be taken up in as eager a pursuit after the pleasures and profits, the business and amusements of life, as ever they were before; and when they have accomplished, as they imagine, the ends they proposed, when they shall say to themselves, we are now at peace, and in a state of prosperity, then shall the *fatal day* rush in upon them on a sudden, like an impetuous torrent, and overwhelm them with a swift and irresistible destruction. When the man of pleasure is gratifying all his sensual appetites, at the expence of every social virtue; when the ambitious man is grasping at exorbitant power, by tyranny and oppression; when the miser is accumulating immense riches, by usurious contracts, and grinding the poor; then they will see all their revels and licentious amusements, all their towering hopes and expectations, all their ill-gotten treasures at one instant absolutely lost and swallowed up in the general devastation. Whilst the athiestical free-thinkers of that day shall be making their profane and ludicrous reflections on the creation of the world; whilst they shall be laughing and making a mock at the awful prediction of its final conflagration, they shall then have an unexpected, a self-evident proof of it, and stand convicted with horror and amazement. For we do not find in any part of the sacred Scriptures, that mankind will have the least previous notice of this wonderful

ful revolution; there will be no uncommon or shocking events, no visible decay in nature, no apparent symptoms of the world's approaching dissolution; the sun and moon will rule the day and night as usual, the seasons will maintain their stated course, and the world will, to all outward appearance, seem likely to last for many generations; nature, however, though thus seemingly vigorous and in her bloom, though thus gay, and fresh complectioned, shall all on a sudden sicken, droop, and die. Now, all misfortunes, of what nature or kind soever, are the greater, as they are instantaneous, and altogether unthought of; because, under such circumstances, a man has no time for recollection, no opportunity of being upon his guard; his reason is too far shocked to be capable of taking a clear and distinct view of the nature and extent of the impending ruin; so that, to his confused imagination, it seems altogether boundless. And that which is still a very aggravating circumstance is this, that men have frequently very just grounds to conclude, that such calamities might, by prudence and precaution, have been foreseen and timely prevented; and must therefore be conscious to themselves, that their surprise is wholly owing to their own ill conduct. If then the common and obvious calamities to which we are daily exposed are made more irksome and heavy, by their falling upon us unawares, how must the *terror of that day* be aggrandized by such a general conflagration, as that which we are now speaking of, when the form of all things will appear hideous and frightful; when the miscarriage will be past all recovery, and when the torment will be too sharp and violent to be sustained with patience!

A SECOND circumstance which will add very much to the pomp and grandeur of this *great day of retribution* will be the prodigious extent of it ; that is to say, the appearance at that time will be universal. There will then be a general assembly of persons of all ranks and distinctions, of all ages and nations, high and low, rich and poor ; the beggar and the prince will be promiscuously summoned to this grand assize. No one, how great and powerful soever, will then have interest enough to be excused from his attendance ; no one, how narrow soever his circumstances, how much neglected soever in this life, will, at that time be over-looked or disregarded ; no monarch, though ever so haughty and imperious, will then be permitted to appear by proxy ; but each individual, let his state and condition be what it will, must stand in person before this awful Tribunal. And in order to make this numberless concourse of souls still more conspicuous, it is highly probable, that all such as have had any relation, correspondence, or engagement with each other, whilst in the land of the living ; all such as have indulged or offended, debauched or reclaimed their neighbours, shall be planted or ranged in such a manner as to be within view, and be brought to a reacquaintance one with another. And should that be the case, where will the sinner and ungodly appear ? How will the oppressor stand aghast, when the injured and helpless, whom he has without mercy crushed, as it were, to pieces, and robbed of their right, shall confront him ! With what shame and confusion of face must all those stand, who have reviled and calumniated their neighbours without a cause, or have betrayed the trusts, which have been reposed in them ; when they shall be obliged

obliged to make their personal appearance before those whom they have thus shamefully traduced, thus inhumanly injured and destroyed! What disagreeable companions must all such be at their second interview, who have countenanced and encouraged one another in the commission of the most inhuman barbarities! Who have been sons of violence, and have sacrificed, not only large populous cities, but whole kingdoms to their unbounded lust of power! How will the *Alexanders* and *Cæsars*, the *Neros* and *Domitians* of the earth stand aghast, when whole armies and nations of murdered men shall surround them, and cry aloud for justice!

AND as, on the one hand, this solemn meeting will be thus dreadful to the ungodly; how comfortable a sight will it be, on the other, to the righteous, to meet with such as were once naked, but were cloathed by them, sick and in prison, and were visited by them! How great must the satisfaction of those be, who have opened the eyes of the blind, and recovered them from a state of ignorance and error! Who have rescued their friends from the sons of violence, or the merciless hands of the tyrant and oppressor!

A THIRD very awful circumstance of this *great day* will consist in the majesty of him before whom we shall be summoned. When our blessed Lord was first manifest in the flesh, and assumed our nature (sin only excepted) when he came down from the throne of his Father to make atonement for the sins of mankind, he condescended to live in a state of obscurity, to be the object of contempt, and at last to die a painful and ignominious death, even the death of the Cross, for our salvation: but at the time appointed for the destruction of the

world by fire ; on the day fixed for his execution of judgment, in order to be a terror to all evil-doers, and a praise and glory to all such as have done well ; when he shall come to avenge his own and his adherents cause ; he will then appear in all his grandeur, and be attended, in such a manner as will be agreeable, in every respect, to the dignity of his office. He himself has been pleased to inform us, in what splendor he proposes to shine, when he shall make his second descent ; when he shall come in the glory of his Father, accompanied with an infinite host of holy angels. At that time, we are told, he will *deck himself with light, as with a garment, and be clothed with majesty and honour.* At that time, he will make his publick appearance in all the pomp and magnificence of heaven ; the Archangels, and all the other celestial intelligences, shall be ranged in their hierarchal order, be drest in their robes of state, and display the lustre of their exalted natures. And though at his *first coming* he thought proper to have none of those powers to attend him ; yet at his *second* he will have legions to wait upon him. *Thousands of thousands,* says the Prophet *Daniel shall minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him.* Then his appearance will be every way suitable to the grandeur and majesty of the King of Heaven. His glory will then shine forth with such inconcievable lustre, that all nature will sink under his presence, and be melted away with his refulgent brightness. The representation of it, as St. *John* has given it us in his *Vision*, runs thus, *I saw, says he, a great white throne, and him that sat on it ; from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away, and there was no place found for them.* And if this will be the case,

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as doubtless it will, we may very well join with the Prophet, and say, *Who may abide the day of his coming, and stand at his appearing?*

MOREOVER, at that *great day* every one will receive according to what he has done, whether it be good or evil. *Shall the judge of all the earth do wrong?* Where the judge is above the influence either of favour or disaffection, and has power to maintain his definitive sentence, there it must be absolutely impossible that justice should fail.

OUR blessed Lord is perfectly well acquainted with the circumstances of all such as he intends to pass his final sentence on. He who made all things, and by whom all things consist, needs not that any should testify of man; for he knows what is in man; *he is about our paths, and about our beds, and spies out all our ways; he understands our thoughts afar off.* His eyes are upon us, though we are out of the sight of all mankind; though in the darkest corner of the earth, or the most remote retirement; for *all things are naked and open to him, with whom we have to do.* He tries our hearts, and searches out our spirits; so that, if there be the least pollution in them, he cannot but know it, and it will be altogether impossible to conceal any wickedness, how secret soever, from him.

THE practice of virtue and vice is frequently mistaken in this world. As, on the one hand, innocence and integrity are too often misrepresented by ignorance and malice; as the most unblamable conduct is too often obscured by prejudice and prepossession; so, on the other, things that are really in themselves black and scandalous, are varnished over with a specious appearance. The most fulsome adulation is too often termed friendship and good-

good-nature ; the most insufferable pride lies concealed under the delusive title of courage and intrepidity ; ambition passes frequently for zeal, and interest is honoured with the name of religion ; hypocrisy has too many veils ; and it is one of the hardest things in nature to pry into the qualities of actions, and to sound the bottom of mens intentions. At the *last day*, however, *the secrets of all hearts will be revealed*, and every one will make his appearance, as he really is, without the least fallacy or illusion ; and as the virtuous will then no longer lie under the lash of envy and detraction ; as all scandalous and unjust aspersions will then be wiped away, and the *righteous will shine like the Sun in the kingdom of his Father* ; so those who are hypocrites will be detected, and the vicious appear objects of contempt and abhorrence. All pious frauds will then be laid open, and the Devil will no longer be suffered to assume the habit of an angel of light. For, as this judge is omniscient, nothing can escape his all-seeing eye. He that would judge the world in righteousness, and reward every one according to his works, must therefore have a comprehensive knowledge of all things relating to human actions. Now, to state the actions of men rightly, all their powers and purposes, their habits and dispositions, must be perfectly known. An infallible judgment therefore is absolutely necessary to pass a definitive sentence upon the whole race of mankind, and determine their eternal happiness or misery, according to the strictest laws of justice. So that it is evident, no finite understanding, no judgment, less infallible than that of God Almighty himself, is capable of discharging so important an office.

AND

AND as this judge of all the earth is omniscient, so he is absolutely impartial and unbiaſſed: He will never condemn the innocent, or acquit the guilty out of any private favour or affection; but every one will receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Every one will have final ſentence paſſed upon him according to the merits of his cauſe. Earthly judges are ſubject to many imperfections, and have ſometimes too ſelf-intereſted views to hold the ſcale of juſtice even; but the great judge of all the earth is incapable of doing wrong; he is the fountain and foundation of all righteouſneſs, and, as ſuch, proportions his value and regard for every thing according to its intrinsic merit; and as his nature and inclination leads him to the impartial diſtribution of juſtice; ſo he can have no motives to induce him to act inconſiſtent with himſelf. We can beſtow nothing upon him, of which he is not already poſſeſſed, neither can we poſſibly deprive him of any thing he enjoys. His ſelf-ſufficiency makes him everlaſtingly happy, and conſequently, no fear, on the one hand, or advantage, on the other, can give the leaſt check to his final ſentence: And his Omnipotence ſecures him from all fears of having his judgment reverſed; ſo that he has no inducement in the leaſt to comply with any foreign inclination, or follow the dictates of any one's reaſon but his own. And although this impartial judge of all the earth is beneficent to every man, and his mercy is over all his works; though tendereſs and indulgence, though pity and compaſſion are his darling attributes; yet there is no juſt reaſon for any one to rely wholly upon them; ſince he will never ſtretch them ſo far as to treſpaſs on his

justice. He will not break his own laws to make those happy who have bid defiance to his power, have turned a deaf ear to his counsel, and would have none of his reproof : Since they have abused his blessings, and neglected the means of Salvation ; since neither his promises, on the one hand, nor his menaces, on the other ; since, in short, neither his mercies nor his judgments could work any manner of change or reformation in them, *he will mock at their calamity, and laugh when their fear cometh* ; that is, in other terms, he will not hearken to their prayers, when so untimely offered ; no importunities will be able to make him relent, or recal the determination of his anger. What, therefore, a man sows, that must he also expect to reap.—And as the resolutions of an omnipotent and impartial judge must of necessity be just ; so neither can they ever fail of having their due effect.—When *Christ* shall descend again at the *last day*, when he shall whet his glittering sword, and his hand shall take hold of judgment, he will then render vengeance to all those that hate him. However, as our blessed Saviour will be an impartial, omnipotent, and awful judge to the wicked ; so will he be a merciful and loving judge to all those who use their utmost endeavours, how imperfect soever they may be, to love and obey him. He will not proceed with rigour against any of us, who sincerely repent of our evil ways, nor pass sentence of condemnation upon us, for not performing up to the highest pitch of human strength. He will make some allowance for the infirmities of nature, and the disadvantages we labour under : *He knows whereof we are made, and remembers that we are but dust* ; as, therefore, a father pities his own children, so will the Lord be merciful to those that fear him.

To

To conclude, since there will come a *day*, and how soon we know not, in which the secrets of all hearts will be revealed; how ought we to avoid doing any thing against the dictates of our own consciences, or any thing that will not stand the severest test! We ought to commune with our own hearts, to pry deeply, and without partiality, into all our actions, lest some accursed thing should lie latent in us, which either pleasure or business may possibly cause us to overlook.—Let us act with such sincerity and godly simplicity, as becomes those who live in the expectation of that awful day. Let us take no wicked thing in hand, but walk with a perfect heart. Let us renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, and do all that in us lies, to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.

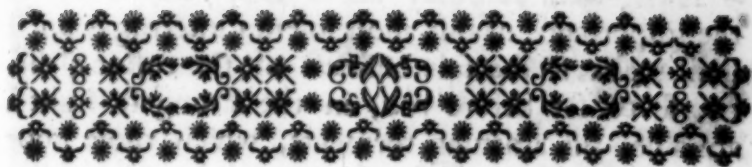
Moreover, the consideration of the certainty of such a judgment, and the uncertainty of the day appointed for that grand solemnity, should wean us from a too eager pursuit after the profits and pleasures of this transitory life.—Why should we set our affections on things that are so fleeting in their nature, and which in a few years at least, will vanish from our eyes, and be seen no more? Since the enjoyments of this world are thus precarious, and the pleasures of the other are everlasting, that consideration alone, ought to give them a vast preference, and make them infinitely more desirable. Since we have no continued city here, let us seek one above. Since, in a word, we are here only in a state of probation, and are shortly to be translated into the realms of bliss, or be plunged into an abyss of eternal misery, let us take care to spend our lives in such a manner, as that we may have a comfortable assurance of the former; and that
when

when we come to be summoned before *Christ's* awful Tribunal at the *last day*, we may give our account with joy, and not with grief.

WHICH God of his infinite mercy grant, thro' the merits of his Son *Jesus Christ* our Lord, to whom be ascribed all honour, glory, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore.
Amen.



SUNDAY



SUNDAY XXIX.

A Description of the Torments of Hell.

JOB XXXI. 3.

*Is not destruction to the wicked, and a strange
punishment to the workers of iniquity?*



SINCE a very tremendous
end will, doubtless, be the lot
of all such as depart this life with-
out making their peace with
the Almighty, the best use I can
possibly make of the words now
read to you is this, to exhort you
frequently to reflect, with fear and trembling,
on the Terrors of the Lord, and to put the awful
question in our text, seriously to yourselves,
namely,

namely, *Is not destruction to the wicked, and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?*

AND, that you may all be fully convinced of the importance of this most solemn interrogation, I shall make it the sole business of the ensuing discourse to set before you, in the strongest light I am able, the amazing torments, which those poor wretches must undergo forever and ever, who, whilst living, sinned without remorse, and died without sincere repentance.

AND, on this occasion we shall lay aside all uncertain conjectures, and keep close to the hints which we find interspersed throughout the sacred Scriptures concerning those endless torments. But let us, I beseech you, be very serious and attentive to an inquiry of so important a nature. We are now about to see what will be the end, what the fatal consequence of a wicked course of life; and, in order to form an adequate idea of it, we must look, by faith, into the eternal prisons of the damned; that we may, by such a view, be deterred from the committing of those enormities which lead to so fearful a destruction; that by reflecting on the deplorable effects of other mens folly, we may learn wisdom, and that their punishment may be the ground-work of our future felicity.

Now Hell, that is to say, the mansions of the damned, being a place wherein divine justice executes his hottest vengeance on all impenitent sinners, we may easily conceive it to be a very dismal situation. It was first prepared for the Devil and his Angels, when they rebelled against their Maker, and thereby became unworthy to partake any longer of the honour and happiness of his presence and glory in Heaven; then was this place prepared

prepared for their reception, where they are to be punished forever, according to their demerits; and the nature and state of the place must, doubtless, be such, as is very suitable to so tremendous a design. The Holy Scriptures expressly tell us, in many places, which cannot but occur to your remembrance, that Hell is a place of impenetrable darkness, and if we were to understand this literally, it is but reasonable; since it is a place set apart for punishment and misery, and darkness is but adapted to such a plan. Light is cheerful and pleasant, but darkness melancholy and sad. As it is no ways to be questioned, but that a very bright light or glory will embellish the celestial mansions, and make them infinitely more engaging on that account; so likewise such a darkness may be supposed to hover over the deep abyss of Hell, as must augment its terrors. Figure to yourselves then a place, wherein no cheerful ray of either sun or moon had ever entered, a dungeon into which no other gleam of light had ever pierced than what arises from sulphureous flames. A gloomy, dusky light we may suppose indeed it may enjoy (if that can properly be termed enjoyment) since such a gloom seems to contribute more towards the horror of it, than an absolute privation of all light would do; besides, such a gloom is more agreeable to another property, which the Holy Scriptures attribute to this woeful place, namely, that it is said to be filled with fire.

OUR Blessed Lord himself declares, that when he shall come at the last day to judge both the quick and the dead, he will pronounce this irreverfible sentence upon wicked men, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.* There are some difficulties, it is true, in understanding this fire literally; but yet

yet we may do it, without any trespass upon our reason. What a sort of fire indeed it is, we must not pretend to determine; but that it is of a very different nature from that which we are here acquainted with, must be allowed from what is said of it in Scripture.

It is a fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels; who (as we suppose) are meer spirits, and therefore it is such as is able to afflict a spirit with a sense of pain and torment. And such too it must be, that it may affect and punish the separate souls of men, while their bodies yet remain mouldering in the grave. It is also a fire which in its nature is everlasting, and must be therefore of a different kind from ours. The latter is a transient, perishing flame, which consumes its own fuel, and then expires; but the former will not only exceedingly torment; but will never waste the fuel on which it feeds; will never consume those wicked men, those Devils, who shall be thrown headlong into it; nor will it ever languish, or go out. It is a peculiar fire, calculated for a peculiar purpose; it is something which the divine wrath has ordained to be his instrument to punish and torment his rebellious subjects; to afflict the souls as well as bodies of wicked men, and even such intellectual Beings as have no bodies. We must suppose then, the wretched creatures who are thus thrown into this abyss of endless misery, to be plunged into a lake of fire, a mighty sea of ever-burning brimstone. We may suppose, that these damned wretches are not only scorched, not only singed externally, but are glowing all within, like metals in a fiery furnace. Oh, how terrible a place and punishment is

is prepared for impenitent sinners! How fearful a thing is it, to fall into the hands of the living God! Who of us can dwell with devouring fire? Who can endure everlasting burnings? Since then the conditions of this place are adapted only to the design of it, it will be the interest of the sinner to understand them literally. But though there may be some who will obstinately refuse to do so; yet they must grant thus much: that as the inspired Penmen of the sacred Scriptures describe to us the joys and felicities of heaven, by things that are the most pleasant and most endearing in this world; and after all, we are taught that those joys do infinitely excel those things; so, if they make use of things which are the most deplorable and grievous in this world, whereby to represent the future torments of the wicked, we may reasonably suppose those torments will be infinitely more grievous, than the symbols made use of to represent them are. From the darkness and fires therefore which are said to be in Hell, we may conclude, that no joy, no comfort can possibly enter there; that 'tis a dark, dismal place, set apart for horrid purposes; and that the unhappy wretches, who are doomed to those gloomy regions, dwell in never-ceasing, and most exquisite tortures. No part of the body shall be free from agonizing pains, and the whole soul shall be filled with misery. This will be the sad catastrophe of guilty mirth and pleasure. This will be the final reward of that which is at present prosperous, and much envied wickedness. But what will be an inexpressible addition to the torments of Hell will be the wretched company, the abandoned society that will be found there. The holy Scriptures expressly tell us, that wicked
men

men shall be condemned, and thrown into the place of punishment prepared for the Devil and his Angels.—A rueful company this, from whom no comfort, no pleasure can possibly be derived!

THEY must of necessity therefore augment each others woes; for all who are consigned to those dismal mansions are excessively wicked and malicious; all are implacable enemies to each other; all is discord there, perpetual faction, and eternal war; peace is banished from those gloomy regions, and in her stead, fell hatred, furious contention, and uncontrouled malice set up their thrones. The exquisite tortures which they all endure alike render them the unhappy objects of each others rage and resentment. May we not reasonably imagine on the one hand, that the apostate Angels insult over damned souls; tell them what hopes of bliss they are fallen from; what offers of favour and mercy they have rejected; how they have fooled away a precious space of life on earth, in which they might have gained an eternity of happiness in heaven. And may we not suppose the latter, on the other, revenging themselves as well as they can, on those Devils and apostate spirits; reminding them of the glory and bliss which they have forever lost through their pride and ambition; the wrath and vengeance which they have pulled down upon their own devoted heads; and loading them with curses for their false suggestions, and for contributing, as far as in them lay, towards the ruin and damnation of mankind. And we may well believe likewise, that wicked men will be but very vexatious and uneasy company to one another in those gloomy mansions: even those companions in wickedness, who were the most pleasing to each other in this world, will be

be some of the most odious and ungrateful in the next. Those who tempted and encouraged one another to do wickedly, who hardened each other into a contempt and defiance of all good instruction and wholesome reproof, will there treat each other with the most opprobrious language. In Hell there is no such thing as pity and compassion; no touches of sorrow for the sufferings of each other. Each individual feels so much misery, that no one is at leisure, no one is disposed to any expressions of benevolence or concern. Those who made themselves uneasy to one another here, by their mutual hatred and frequent provocations, will be more implacable enemies than ever, and will exercise their utmost malice against one another on their arrival there. These things are the natural products and effects of extreme wickedness, which is always malicious and prone to mischief; and from hence we may justly conclude, that the members of that infernal society must of necessity be disagreeable companions, and be each others tormentors. How aggravating a circumstance may we easily imagine it must be, for the most implacable enemies to be confined together, and shut up in one and the same dungeon. The straitness of their prison perhaps will not admit, that any one of them may retire from the rest, to lament his own miseries alone, and to be free from the vexations of his invidious companions. This society will likewise be very uneasy to each other upon this further account, namely, that they are all perfectly miserable objects. Every one there dwells amongst a company of wretches who are ever miserable, ever complaining. Every one is surrounded with such, and such only: which way soever they turn themselves, they can

behold no other objects but spectacles of horror. It cannot be difficult to apprehend, that it must be a most dreadful mortification to dwell with those who are in continual torment. We are commonly affected, as it were, with the sorrows of those whom we converse with, and it makes us dull and melancholy to sit with them. Certainly then, it will be a very dismal thing to be confined in this dark and dismal house of mourning; amidst eternal howlings, and rueful complaints of despairing creatures. What a harsh and discordant sound will the mixture of their shrieks, their groans, and their ravings make! What a ghastly spectacle will it be to see one another surrounded with flames, and pierced thro' with fires; to see the distorted countenances by which each one is forced to betray the torments that he feels! Thus the damned creatures burn all the more, and all are the more miserable for their being confined together.

THE unruly lusts and passions which the obdurate and impenitent sinner went out of the world possessed of and governed by, will exceedingly add to his misery and punishment; for he must remain subject and enslaved to them forever; they are the disorders, the distempers of the soul; they discompose its harmony, and disturb its peace; they deform, and fill it with discord and confusion. In Hell, those violent desires will remain; but then there will be no possibility of ever gratifying them. And from frustrated, vain and violent desire the sinner must needs conceive an unspeakable torment; and this, like a too cumbrous load, will gaul and oppress him. His sorrows are pure and unmixed, such as
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has not the least allay of comfort or of hope. He lives in doleful anguish of mind; he can perceive, he can think of nothing, but what gives him grief and pain. He mourns, when he reflects on what he has been, and what he is; what he might have attained and enjoyed, and what he must now endure forever and ever. It is highly probable likewise, that the inhabitants of Hell are transported with an empty, impotent rage against the Almighty; for we may observe what rage, what defiance of Heaven will sometimes possess the hardened sinner here, when he meets with any considerable affliction, or but a contradiction to his wayward humour. And if he be possessed with the like inordinate, restless, and unruly passions there, they will torment him to the last degree; because he will be sensible, that all the utmost efforts of his malice will be vain, and sting nobody but himself. The sinner, when once chained down in his infernal dungeon, cannot humbly submit to his griefs, nor bear his afflictions with any degree of patience, and by that means make them the more easy and tolerable to himself: he never was accustomed to an acquiescence and submission to the Divine Will whilst here on earth, and therefore to be sure, cannot bear the thoughts of the least condescension in his gloomy cavern. He will therefore be always engaging in a vain and fruitless contest with One that is too mighty for him; always struggling with adamant chains of Fate, which will hold him fast, notwithstanding all his endeavours to get loose. He is tormented with envy likewise, we may well imagine, against the happy inhabitants of Heaven. With envy and disdain he sees some

honoured whom he despised, some justified whom he condemned, some applauded whom he slandered and reproached, and some blest and happy whom he persecuted; yea blessed for those persecutions, which they suffered from him, whilst he is condemned, and doomed to eternal torments for inflicting them. Thus a passionate and vicious mind may be a severe torment to itself; and the sinner in Hell will be an everlasting self-tormentor. For he will continually be aiming at the gratification of his passions, which he can never accomplish, and will be incessantly endeavouring to break those fetters with which he will be fast bound forever and ever.

BITTER despair will be another exquisite torment which the sinner must endure. He lies continually reflecting on the eternity of his torments. Whatever harrasses and perplexes him, carries this additional sting with it from his own consciousness, that the vexation will never cease. Are all his darling pleasures and enjoyments vanished?—His own conscience assures him that they are. — Does he find himself condemned to a dismal place where no joy has the least admission? Does he perceive himself confined to a most unsufferable set of companions? Does he feel himself universally afflicted with inexpressible torments? All this his distracted thoughts convince him he must endure forever. As his condition is truly desperate; so he knows it to be so; and despair accordingly has got the full possession of his soul, and afflicts him with all its bitterness. He is not able to flatter himself there, even with the faintest glimpse of hope; nay, he cannot there procure so much ease, as even a false hope would afford: No, whatever he may believe now concerning the duration of those torments,

torments, he will then be assured, that they shall last forever. He will have the terrible sentence of the judge, which has doomed him to everlasting fire, always sounding in his ears; and by his thus continually reflecting on the eternity of his torments, he afflicts himself with what is to come, as well as with what he actually endures; and collects, as it were, into every moment of his duration, the terror of an eternal torment. As hope can alleviate the heaviest sorrows, and give some ease under the most agonizing pains; so despair will make the lightest evil, a burden too heavy to be borne: How much more then, must it needs aggravate the astonishing torments of Hell!

CAN there still be any farther addition to the pangs and torments of the damned? — Yes — The self-condemnation and rebukes of the sinner's own conscience. The Almighty dooms none but hardened and impenitent sinners to everlasting torment, and never passes an irreversible decree of punishment on them till the measure of their iniquities is full. So that this will be the condemnation which every sinner will be exposed to, that he has ruined and destroyed himself: And when he is rolling about, restless and impatient in the flames of Hell, he will still be aggravating his torments with such stinging thoughts as these; "Whatever I endure here, I can justly blame no one but myself for it. I have brought this everlasting destruction upon myself. I was obstinately set upon the vicious course of life, which brought me hither. And after I had sinned and deserved these torments, there was mercy offered me, upon condition of my sincere repentance; but I refused it. I have sold my soul alas! for an empty shadow. Oh how vain, how worthless, how un-

satisfactory were those gilded trifles, falsely called pleasures, for which I have incurred my damnation! If all the kingdoms of the world, and the utmost glory of them had been laid at my feet, and I could have enjoyed them all for as many millions of years as there are sands on the sea-shore; yet I had been a fool, if even this would have tempted me to make myself everlastingly miserable! What then am I now, who, for a momentary and imaginary enjoyment of but a very small portion of the world, have plunged myself headlong into a sea of everlasting torments?"

THUS will the condemned sinner's conscience lash and torment itself. And in Hell these lashes and rebukes will give him no intermission; because they will continually be provoked and edged with the miseries which he shall there endure forever, without the least abatement.

THUS have we attempted to represent to you the future punishment of sinners; and I doubt not, but the sketch is very imperfectly drawn; it is rather out-lines only, than a finished piece. Permit me, therefore, before I quit the melancholy subject, to add one word or two of exhortation.

CONSIDER, before you indulge yourselves in any wicked practice, what may be the fatal consequence of such indulgence. May it not be the loss of heaven, of a place in those blessed mansions, where joy and peace abound? May it not be the incurring as great damnation for it? Consider then, shame, ruin and destruction here are the usual wages of sin, and if temporal destruction makes so ghastly a figure; how like a fiend must *everlasting destruction* look! If the anguish of the soul, and the pains of the body be so tormenting; what will the destruction be of both body and soul

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in Hell? If a serpent gnawing in our bowels be a representation of an insupportable misery here, what will that be of the *worm that never dies*? If a raging and devouring fire, which can last but till it hath consumed a fading substance, be in its appearance so amazing, and in its pain so violent, how *inexpressible* will those torments be that proceed from the wrath of an incensed God, which shall burn like fire, and yet be everlasting? Reflect then seriously on these important articles whilst God gives you time to consider of them; and think it an inestimable mercy that you have still an hour left you to repent sincerely of your sins, to implore the divine favour and forgiveness, to atone for your mispent time, and to depart from your iniquities; to be fervent and frequent in prayer, to have a guard over all your actions; and in a word, to be obedient and resigned in all things to the Will of God, your ever blessed Redeemer. *Amen.*



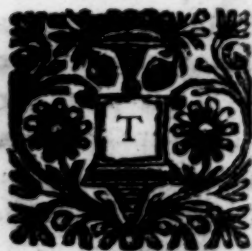


SUNDAY XXX.

Hell Torments Eternal.

REVELATIONS XIV. 2.

*And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up
forever and ever.*



HERE is no mistake, as I conceive, more pernicious and fatal in its consequences to mankind, than their unwarrantable dependance on God's infinite goodness and mercy, not withstanding the sacred Scriptures abound with so many awful and repeated menaces denounced against all stubborn and impenitent

penitent sinners. 'Tis this fond, this ill-grounded hope of God's pardon and forgiveness at last, that tempts and encourages so many to lead the most profligate and abandoned lives. For, were they not unhappily prepossessed by some such deceitful delusion, it is hardly to be conceived, that any one could be so presumptuous and void of reason, as to run the risk of eternal damnation.

DID these poor infatuated wretches in reality believe, that everlasting torments would be the woful result of their repeated sins, I am fully convinced, that there is no man, endowed with the least degree of reason, but would seriously reflect on his danger, and resolve on an immediate reformation; no one in his senses but would be in the greatest agonies of mind, till he had some well-grounded hopes of avoiding so astonishing, so dreadful, and so irretrievable a disaster.

'Tis our duty, therefore, at proper seasons, (though none, 'tis true, can well be deemed altogether improper) to use our best endeavours to open mens eyes, and give them timely notice of the imminent danger to which they are exposed. The generality of mankind, though I am sorry to make the observation, in this part of the world at least, seem to be sunk into an absolute insensibility as to this great and important truth. Men were, doubtless, as wise in former ages as they are at present, and how many of those, of the deepest learning and the brightest parts, rejoiced to be called out to suffer whatever the malice and cruelty, not only of their mortal enemies, but of the Devils themselves could possibly devise, from a full conviction, that they should be happy to all eternity in another world, and that the shameful denial of their faith would prove an inevitable bar to their everlasting felicity.

THAT

THAT eternal misery is frequently threatned in the sacred Scriptures is a point so obvious and self-evident, that it would be perfectly needless to waste any time in the proof of it; my present business therefore, shall be to demonstrate to you, that God will most certainly inflict the punishment which he has so solemnly threatned. And such a subject as this, will surely engage your most serious attention, since no less than an eternity of woe will be the result of your ignorance, or neglect of this important truth. *For in hell, the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever.*

AND, in order to make good the preceding assertion, I cannot, I presume, answer your expectations better, than by demonstrating, that the infliction of an everlasting punishment upon hardened and impenitent sinners is perfectly consistent with God's impartial justice, notwithstanding that mercy and patience are pronounced in the sacred Scriptures to be his darling attributes.

AND this, I conceive, will appear beyond all contradiction, from the following consideration, namely,

THAT nothing can be inconsistent with God's justice, and goodness, with which his truth, his wisdom, his holiness, or any other of his attributes, demands a compliance. And the reason is plain and obvious, since there is a most exact harmony among all God's perfections, which can never interfere with each other, but must move consistently together. God is not only just, but good to all his creatures in general; but then, he always exercises his justice, and extends his mercy and loving-kindness, according to the express tenour of his threats and promises; and

as shall suit best with the wisdom of his Providence, and conduce most to his honour and glory.

AND in the case now before us, he has expressly and solemnly declared, in other places of Scripture, as well as in my text, *that he will punish the wicked with eternal torments.* And, as it is not to be expected, that God should recede from the most positive, and peremptory declarations of his Will; so it cannot be conceived, that he should make any such declaration, if it were either an act of injustice or cruelty to carry his menaces into execution. For this would set God's veracity at variance with his justice, and goodness: No objection, therefore, can lie against an eternity of torments, if God Almighty sees fit to inflict it, unless the reason of that objection be something more evident and undeniable, than all the declarations of Scripture on the other side of the question. And such a reason, I dare venture to assert, can no where be met with.

THUS again, if God has threatned sinners with everlasting punishment, the only motive to that menace must be, to lay an effectual restraint upon mens lusts, and keep them within the bounds of their obedience, by the awful prospect of endless misery. And, who can say, that this is not a very wise, and considerate motive, and every way worthy of a just, and a merciful God? But if, upon a nearer scrutiny, it should appear to be inconsistent with God's justice, or mercy, even to execute that punishment which he has threatned; and if men were, (as they that object it pretend, at least, to be) aware of this inconsistency; then this wise provision would in reality defeat itself; it would render God's Authority little less than mean

mean and contemptible ; and considering the hardness of mens hearts, it would, 'tis to be feared, make them but still more secure, and presumptuous in their sins ; so that God could not threaten sinners with eternal death wisely, unless he could do it justly : But having done it, he must be owned to do it both justly and wisely ; for otherwise, his truth, his wisdom, and his justice, would clash and interfere with one another.

ONCE more, since there is an infinite contrariety between the purity, and holiness of God, and the depravity of a sinner ; and since all sin includes some punishment suitable to its nature ; and since no sinner, who wilfully so continues, and wretchedly so departs, can be purged from his pollutions after death ; it follows, that all such, if they be liable to be punished at all (as indisputably they are) must be also liable to eternal punishment ; because, in God's purer eyes, they will always be looked upon as most hardened and impenitent sinners ; and as such, they are totally excluded from all hopes of favour, and must forever remain the accursed objects of his highest, and most just displeasure. How, therefore, can that punishment be alledged as inconsistent with the divine justice, and goodness, which not only God's immutable truth, and unerring wisdom, but even his essential purity and holiness, and inflexible justice, do (as it were) claim at his hands ; as being absolute necessary to vindicate his own honour, and impartial right to all his perfections ? But, the nature of man, if considered and compared with that condition which he has brought himself into by sin, will be a farther vindication (if need be) of the divine justice, and goodness, in the infliction of eternal torments.

FOR

FOR man is naturally immortal, I mean, as to the more considerable part of him, his Soul ; which was so framed from God, as not to be subject to corruption, or dissolution. To pain and sorrow, indeed it is ; and of all sorrows none so keen, none so piercing, on this side Hell, as that of a wounded spirit, labouring under the heavy load of unexpiated guilt, and distracted with the dreadful apprehensions of ensuing vengeance. And the man that dies with these awful terrors upon him, (as all that are impenitent do) must of necessity be miserable forever and ever. For an immortal spirit must subsist to all eternity ; and a damned spirit must suffer eternally ; because, so long as it exists, it always carries the cruel cause of its own misery within itself : For the worm of conscience which never dies, gnaws inwardly ; and, it must be a perpetual source of uninterrupted torment to the soul, that finds and feels itself in this most deplorable state and condition, to be still either looking up with despairing eyes towards that happiness, which he has forfeited, and is now quite out of his reach ; or else, looking downwards, with horror, into that abyss of misery, which no duration can exhaust, nor hope diminish ; because it is, and must be as durable as its very essence. Since, therefore, such is the nature of man, as created by God, and since such is his condition, as impaired by sin ; it cannot be imputed to any want of justice, or goodness in God, that sinners should suffer everlasting torment. This, I say, cannot be imputed to him ; unless it were a piece of injustice, to endow them with immortal souls at first, or a piece of justice to make them mortal again at last (even contrary to the very frame of their natures)

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left when they might have been forever happy, they should, through their own transgression, become miserable to all eternity.

If it be considered, therefore, after all, that this is no other than the necessary effect, and unavoidable consequence of their own foolish and perverse choice ; God must be clear of all injustice, and cruelty, when he adjudgeth such obstinate sinners to eternal torments. If, indeed, men had been kept in a total ignorance of Heaven and Hell ; if they never had any real motives to be good, and were never discouraged from pursuing their iniquitous practices ; if they had been under a fatal determination, without any will or liberty of their own, for their guidance and direction ; or, if they had been destitute of all power of themselves, or assistance from above, either to attain to that happiness, which is held out to them only in mockery, and at a distance ; or, to avoid that misery, upon the precipice of which they are continually walking ; I say, had these been their hard circumstances, the rigour had been most extreme, and there had been not only some colour, but just reason for complaint. Since life, however, and death is fairly set before them ; since the invitation, on the one hand, is no less than that of an infinite reward, and the terror, on the other, no less than that of an infinite punishment ; since they are left to their own freedom, either to chuse, or to refuse ; and, since (besides their own natural desire of happiness and aversion to misery) they have the promise of supernatural grace to sanctify, and cleanse them, and prepare them for glory : I say, if under all these advantages, they are so unhappy as to miscarry at last, they must charge God as foolishly, as they destroy themselves, if they

they presume to assert, or think, that he is either unjust, or severe, for suffering them to inherit that portion, which belongs unto them, even the fatal effects of their own folly and misconduct.

AND what has been said upon this article is sufficient, not only to vindicate God's justice, but to magnify it likewise. For set an eternal reward against an eternal punishment, and throw the merit of all the Saints into one scale (if I may be indulged the expression) and the demerit of the least of sinners, that dies impenitent into the other; and the excess of the reward will appear so immensely great, upon the comparison, that sure, I am, God must be owned not only to be just, but infinitely gracious and indulgent.

NAY, upon an impartial estimate, the severity of God's menaces is so far from being any imputation upon his infinite mercy and forbearance, that it is indeed, the most illustrious demonstration of them. For his manifest intention herein, is not to conclude men under sin, or hurry them into despair; but to frighten them out of it, and rouse them to repentance. And the more loud, and shocking to nature these warnings are, the more indulgence and mercy there is in them. For, it shews, how tender God is of the welfare of his creatures, and how exceedingly desirous he is of their happiness; that lest the more ingenuous principle of love, or even hope, should prove ineffectual, he has spoke aloud to their fear, in order to imprint on their minds a due sense of their danger; that they might be saved, by some means or another.

AND, I am firmly persuaded, from these general reflections which I have here collected (if you will but add them together, and take them into
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your most serious consideration) that you will agree with me, that it cannot be inconsistent with God's justice, or goodness, to inflict eternal punishment upon obstinate, and incorrigible sinners.

BUT, lest it should be thought, that an objection drawn up in form, might be able to overthrow all that has been hitherto advanced; let us try the strength of that which stands in our way. And I know of but one that deserves an answer, and that is, that the principal end of all punishment is to reclaim offenders; but in Hell, there is no repentance, no possibility of amendment, and for that reason, the torments of Hell are cruel and unjust. But, by the way, this is no objection against eternal punishment; but rather against any punishment at all in another world. All the little difficulty, however, that seems to occur, will be easily cleared up, by the aid and assistance of a very obvious, but necessary distinction; namely, that the end of punishments, in regard to this life, and that which is to come, is widely distant. In this life the immediate intention of those temporal judgments, which God actually inflicts, and even of those future punishments, which he so terribly threatens, is to bring sinners to repentance, and to work out their reformation. But if, notwithstanding these methods of discipline, they are resolutely bent to live and die in the gratification of their unruly appetites, they effectually defeat God's gracious purpose, and render themselves incapable of the favour he intended them. This, however, hinders not, but that God may, and indeed cannot but shew the severest marks of his indignation, against such profligate wretches; even for his own honour's sake, and for the demonstra-

monstration of his just abhorrence and detestation of the least sin whatever. And this is the ultimate end of all punishments in the next life; which is then at last carried into execution, when the state of the sinner is remediless and irretrievable. And sure, it can be no unrighteousness in God, to make those men the everlasting monuments of his vengeance in Hell, who once presumptuously bid him defiance; and *because judgment was not executed speedily against them*, regarded not his menaces, nor seemed under apprehension of his avenging wrath. No; even this last act of inexorable justice will clearly approve itself to all the blessed company of Saints, and Angels, who will see abundant reason, not only to acquiesce in God's just proceedings, but also to glorify his peculiar mercy; that he should deliver them from Hell-torments, and establish them in endless, and extatic bliss.

AND thus, I have endeavoured to maintain and vindicate the truth of my proposition, *viz.* that the execution of eternal punishment upon sinners is consistent with God's justice and goodness; against which, if there be any thing else that is material to be objected, besides what I have taken notice of, I doubt not, but it may be easily resolved upon the principles already laid down.

AND now, upon the whole matter, since the case of perverse and impenitent sinners is so very helpless, and deplorable; since nothing can screen them from God's avenging hand; since rocks, and mountains cannot hide them; since death itself shall flee from them, and annihilation afford no shelter; since their being shall forever be continued, and made the seat, and subject of everlasting torments; since the mercy they have de-

spised, shall, at last, deliver them up into the hands of justice, and the judge they have provoked, shall triumph over them without the least eye of pity, in the day of vengeance: " Let us take heed, my brethren, lest there should remain in any of us an evil and unbelieving heart; let us take heed of cherishing any vain, or wicked thought, that may take off the edge of God's threatnings, and abate of their real terror; that may feed us with flattering hopes of finding relief, in Hell itself, and of once seeing the period of endless misery; or delude us with false notions of God's justice, and mercy; in derogation to his truth, his wisdom, and holiness; or that may any ways contribute towards our security or presumption. In short, let us not affront God's goodness, nor insult his justice, by being over-officious to defend it. Let us not fence against Hell-fire with subtleties, nor think to avoid everlasting destruction, by raising objections against it; but let us consider, that the great God, holy and true, is our judge, and our avenger; and in our meditations thereon, let us be afraid, and let us stand in awe, and sin not; lest he pluck us away, and there be none to deliver us.

AND let us reflect seriously upon that vast eternity, into which we are launching, when once this transitory life is ended.

AN eternity of happiness, or an eternity of misery! How surprising and transporting that! How amazing, and confounding this! How boundless, and unfathomable both! But let us lay these things to heart, and consider our latter end: And let us consider (if that be still to be considered) which is most desirable; *eternal happiness, or eternal misery.* And let us ask this one serious
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and important question, Would any man be content to purchase the most exquisite pleasures that refined Epicurism can possibly devise, for a season; suppose the twentieth part of a short life; I say, would any man be content with making such a purchase, were he sure to pay dearly for it all the rest of his days, in the crucifying and never-ceasing pains of the gout or stone? And is it not a much more irrational choice, a much more unequal bargain for a man to take his swing of sinful pleasures, which can last but a very few years at longest; when he verily believes, and has too much reason to be sure of this, and more, that he shall be tormented without intermission, perhaps, for many revolutions of ages, with the most inexpressible anguish of soul, and the sharpest bodily convulsions? And that too, in a place the most loathsome and forlorn, where darkness even to be felt, shall be his habitation, intermingled with dreadful flashes of the most glaring light, to fill his eye with numberless sad spectacles like himself; where sulphureous stench shall be forever in his nostrils, and hideous howlings shall rend his ears; where, in a word, the lamentations, and execrations of his fellow-sufferers, shall aggravate and enhance his vexation, impatience, and amazement.

BUT if we add eternity to the load of all these miseries; O the confusion, and despair of such a reflection! To think, that after millions of millions of ages, and all that vast duration, which neither numbers can compute, or conception reach; the punishment will be but, as it were, beginning, and never, never likely to have an end; being perpetually supported by the sad remembrance of what is past, imbibited by the intolerable anguish of what is present, and exasperated to the last degree,

gree, by the rueful expectation of what is still coming, and will be always still to come. The contemplation only of eternal misery is a torment hardly to be expressed; in compassion to yourselves, however, believe, or there is no way to escape so dreadful a denunciation.

FINALLY, my brethren; let every one of us meditate much and often upon this grand concern, that so we may be excited to serve God with fear and reverence, and flee from his wrath into the arms of his mercy; that the terrors of Hell may have such an influence over us now, that we may not be confounded forever; and that we may depart, not into everlasting punishment, but into life eternal; not into that place of torment, where there is no consolation, where no glimpse of hope can ever enter; but into those heavenly mansions, where rivers of pleasure run at God's right hand for evermore. *Amen.*

The End of the FIRST VOLUME.



